

HAMMOND'S HARD LINES



By
SKELTON
KUPPORD

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BY

SKELTON KUPPORD

*WITH FOUR FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HAROLD COPPING*



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HAMMOND'S HARD LINES.

CHAPTER I.

THE BARGAIN.

TOM HAMMOND wasn't happy. You could hardly expect him to be, for Tom was in prison. Not a real prison, with policemen and all that sort of thing, you know; but just a nice, quiet, respectable sort of private prison.

Of course, it was real enough in one way—and that was the way out. Once you were inside, you had just as little chance of getting out as you would have in Newgate, or any other of the really first-class prisons.

I think I can tell you everything that was in it. First of all, there was Tom. He was in a very bad humour, but for all that he

was the cheeriest thing in that dull, square, white-washed room. Then there was a solid square block of wood in the centre. It was two feet high, and was called a table. Then there was another solid block, fifteen inches high. It was called a chair. You knew which was the chair, for it was the one that you could move about. The table was screwed to the floor.

On the table was an iron ink-pot screwed into the wood, an old pen, and some sheets of unruled writing-paper. There had been a book beside them a few minutes before; but if you wanted Tom's *Vergil* now, you'd have to go into the corner yonder where he had pitched it.

And that was all.

For you can hardly count the tiny little square of sunlight that danced on the wall, divided into four still tinier squares by the two iron bars that guarded the window.

Maybe you think I was wrong when I said that Tom was the cheeriest thing in that dismal cell. But I can tell you that if

you ever get into prison you will not find these tiny little squares of sunlight cheery. Tom didn't. They aggravated him by making him think of the glorious day he was missing.

If only he could have had a look out of that tiny window, he would have been delighted, bars notwithstanding. But though Tom was a big boy for his twelve years, there were only four-and-a-half feet of him. Add one-and-a-quarter for the block called the chair, and you have nearly six feet. Tom was not a very good scholar, but he knew what six from ten left; and he knew that he couldn't jump four feet straight up. If you had asked him how he knew, he would have shown you the marks on his knees and elbows. He had tried.

You may wonder what Tom had done to be put into this very uncomfortable place. Well, to begin with, I am afraid I must confess that Tom was not exactly a good boy. In fact, I may go the length of saying that he was a distinctly bad boy—in some ways

at least. Indeed, Dr. Ackwork, the principal, said that Tom Hammond was the worst boy in Willowbank School, and that was saying a very great deal, as all the farmers in the neighbourhood will tell you.

Now Dr. Ackwork disliked very much to thrash his pupils. You see he had a kind heart, and, besides, he was very fat, and it was such hard work, especially in hot weather. As George Arnold, the American poet, says:

“Whipping to him was a barbarous rule,
And too hard work for his poor old bones;
Besides it was painful, he sometimes said.”

But for all that, Dr. Ackwork had a great deal of this painful work to do. So, when he had noticed, during his holiday wanderings in Germany, the little cells that many of the schools there have for the imprisonment of troublesome boys, he thought it was a capital idea.

Then he thought about Tom, and that fixed it. It was just the thing to save any amount of labour for the next session; so that very night he sent home a long letter,

giving full instructions for the building of a cell in brick, but faced with stone.

So when the boys met after the long vacation, they were very much astonished to see a nice little building, not unlike the house that Jack built, with the word "CARCER" printed above the door.

Now Tom was disgracefully behind in his Latin, but he knew quite a lot about *carcer*. He knew that it was of the third declension—*carcer -eris*, m., a prison. He was sure of this, for he had tried the other way, and found that *carcer*, *carceri*, *carcero* had led him into serious trouble.

So when he looked up at the big "CARCER" he knew all about the word, and he had a sinking feeling at the heart which told him that it would not be long before he had a more intimate acquaintance with the inside of the dainty little building that all the fellows were admiring.

He did not know that it had been built almost expressly for him. He did not even know that Ralston, the cock of the school,

had already a bet of a shilling on with Smithson, the coming cock, that Tom would be the first prisoner.

Tom was very lazy, and he hated Latin; but he was far from stupid, and was quite fond of the science lesson. The first day of the new half included an hour's work in physics, with experiments, so Tom enjoyed himself very much, and kept quite out of mischief that day.

But next morning, which was Wednesday, while the Latin class was going on, the whole school-room was disturbed by a shrill squeak. Everybody stopped to listen, for it was not an ordinary squeak, like a punch-call, that squeaks its squeak and has done with it; but it went on squeaking for at least two-and-a-half minutes, though to that listening school-room it seemed at least ten minutes.

By the time the squeaking died away into a sort of gasp, and then into silence, every eye was fixed on Tom. For a moment the dead silence continued, then Dr. Ackwork puffed over to Tom's desk, and threw up the lid.

There, sure enough, lay the india-rubber balloon, with the squeaker at its mouth—the cause of all this disturbance. It lay flabby and exhausted now, but the Doctor had seen such things before, and knew quite well how the balloon could be blown up, and how the escaping air would cause the squeaking without the help of anybody.

“Hammond, you blew up that thing, and let it squeak in your desk?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Have you anything to say for yourself?”

Like the judge in a court, Dr. Ackwork always gave the culprit a chance to defend himself, but he seldom expected an answer—certainly not in a red-handed case like this. Nevertheless, Tom spoke up.

“Yes, sir; it was a scientific experiment. Mr. Dawkins told us.”

Now, Mr. Dawkins was the science master.

“What do you mean, sir?” thundered the angry headmaster. “What had Mr. Dawkins got to do with your misconduct?”

“Well, he told us yesterday that you

couldn't tell in which direction a brass band was playing just by the sound, without seeing, so I thought nobody would know where the sound of the balloon was coming from, for I took care to let nobody see it. It's not my fault, sir, if the science isn't true; I thought it would be all right."

The Doctor was very red by the time Tom had done, and if the prison had not been such a new thing, nothing would have saved Tom's hide. But the master could not allow such a good occasion to slip. He must try his patent punishment at once.

"We are only working half-days this week, so at one o'clock, Hammond, you will proceed to the Carcer, and remain there till six; during which time you will transcribe ten pages of your *Vergil*."

So at one o'clock Tom had duly "proceeded" (under the careful escort of the junior usher, with whom we have nothing to do) to the Carcer, where we found him.

When we saw him first, it was only three o'clock, and he had written only two pages

of his *Vergil*, before he pitched it into the corner.

Suddenly a happy idea struck him. He dipped his finger into the ink-pot, and traced the outline of a man's face upon the temptingly white wall. It wasn't *very* like Mr. Dawkins, and he was a little discouraged. But the whiteness of that wall was too tempting to be resisted, so he went on, and really, this time, no one who knew Dr. Ackwork could mistake the portrait.

One or two other portraits followed, and then Tom's genius took a higher flight, and pictured wild scenes from his popular stories—red Indians and cabin-boys being the most popular characters, if we except the prime favourite, the man dangling from a rudimentary scaffold. Time was passing in the most gratifying way, when suddenly this recreation came to an untimely end. The ink was all used up!

So Tom sat down on his stool (called a chair) opposite his picture-gallery, and admired it. But he soon grew tired of this,

and even of watching the tiny squares of sunshine creeping slowly up and up the wall.

Then he thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets as deep as he could, stretched out his legs as far as they would go, and sat scowling at the table.

Suddenly he pulled out his hands and rubbed his eyes very hard indeed, for he thought he saw the daintest little fairy standing on the table before him. He was sure he had fallen asleep, and that she would be away when he opened his eyes again. But no, there she was with the same pink frock, the same little crown on her head, the same little wand in her hand, the same mother-of-pearl wings at her back.

She didn't say anything, so Tom kept looking at her. He didn't know that the better class of fairies never speak till they are spoken to.

Afterwards, Tom was astonished at himself for not being more astonished. He was not a bit frightened, and being a bad boy,

treated her just the same as he would have treated any other girl.

"Well, how did you get in here?" he asked rudely.

"I came down that sunbeam," she replied. And if Tom hadn't been a boy he would have noticed how very sweet her voice was. But being a boy, he only grunted:

"And what do you want, now that you are here?"

"You are very discontented," said the fairy.

"Crickey! Did you come all the way from the sun to tell me that? Cows eat grass. Tell me something new. I suppose, now, *you'd* be quite happy in a new patent prison, on a half-holiday, wouldn't you?"

Tom was very sarcastic, but the fairy didn't mind. She had seen so many bad boys that she thought she knew all about them—but she didn't.

"Do you think you would be contented if I gave you Three Wishes?" asked the fairy.

Tom's heart was in his mouth. Here was

the chance he had so often longed for in the nursery at home, before he had got too big for Miss Wharton to manage, and had been sent to Willowbank. Years ago he had made up his mind what *his* three wishes would be if ever he got the chance—and now the lucky moment had come. So he answered very briskly:

“Oh yes, I’ll be quite contented.”

The fairy smiled. She was used to people being quite sure beforehand that they would be perfectly content—but she knew better, and was quite sure they would make a mess of their wishes. She didn’t know what a clever fellow Tom was at everything but his lessons.

“Well, you shall have your Three Wishes; but remember, you must keep to whatever you have wished. Nothing can change them once they are wished. Now, what is your first wish?”

“My first wish,” cried Tom with gleaming eyes, “is to have as many wishes as ever I like.”

Maybe you have never seen a fairy in a rage. If you haven't, you can have no idea how that fairy carried on. She stamped with her tiny feet; she shook her tiny wand at Tom; she fluttered her wings; and spoke so fast that all her words ran into one another, and sounded just like a policeman's whistle—only, of course, not so loud.

Tom only laughed, for he was a bad boy, and saw that he had got the better of the fairy, and he didn't care how much she stamped or whistled. By and by she spoke slower, and said very angrily:

“You bad, selfish, ungrateful boy!”

“Oh, come now, draw it mild,” replied Tom. “I know what you wanted me to do. You wanted me to wish for a white pudding, and then wish it on to my wife's nose, and then wish it off. Yah! I've more sense—and I haven't a wife, anyway.”

If she'd been anything but a fairy, she'd have spread her wings and disappeared up the sunbeam. But fairies, you know, must keep their promises, whether they will or

not. That's the very first law of Fairy-land.

"But, you greedy boy, I haven't all those wishes to give you. We only get our allowance of wishes, and you would use up all mine in no time."

"A nice sort of fairy you are," replied Tom, "to come here promising fellows things you can't give them. Yah! if I was you I'd be ashamed of myself. How much do you get for your allowance, anyway?"

The second law in Fairy-land, as everybody knows, is that all fairies must speak the truth. So this poor fairy had to tell—only she tried to speak so quietly that Tom should not hear her. But he shouted out:

"Speak up!"

And she spoke up:

"One wish every twenty-four hours."

"Come now, that isn't half bad. I'll get everything I want by just waiting for its turn."

"And won't you leave me any at all, you bad, greedy, selfish boy?" said the poor fairy.

“Oh, well,” said Tom, just a little ashamed of himself, “I suppose it’s too bad to take them all away from you, though you did try to make me wish for white puddings and things. I’ll let you have—yes, I’ll let you have a wish every Sunday. What do you say, now?”

“I say that your greed will punish itself, and that you will make a great mess of your wishes.”

“Crickey!” replied Tom laughing. “I thought you would have said ‘Thank you’. That’s what they make me say when anybody gives me anything.”

“You’ll be very sorry for your impudence afterwards,” screamed the fairy; “and when you get yourself into trouble, don’t call on me to help you, for I’ll only come and laugh.”

“How can I call on you when I don’t know your name,” retorted Tom. “What do you call yourself, anyway?”

“Peas-blossom!” screamed the fairy, dancing with rage.

“Hullo! you’re the one we’d to parse

in that beastly Shakespeare? And how's Titania?"

"If you say anything like that again you'll get rheumatism, and I'll be glad," whistled the fairy.

She was in such a rage that Tom suddenly had a happy thought:

"Look here, Peas-blossom, promise me that you won't wish anything nasty to me on Sundays, or else I'll take back my promise to give you my Sunday wishes."

"I promise," said Peas-blossom sullenly.

"What a good thing I remembered that," thought Tom; "I might have had rheumatism every Sunday, or perhaps worse."

"I suppose I may go now?" said Peas-blossom, almost in tears.

"Who's keeping you?" asked Tom, laughing at her distress; but as he looked he stopped laughing, for she was no longer there.

Then he leant back, and wished he was "outside that door". In a twinkling he found himself standing in the sunshine, look-

ing up at the word "CARCER". Then he grunted to himself:

"What an ass I was not to wish myself in the middle of the Wandrage Woods. I'm almost sure to be caught before I get even the length of the lane. I must be more particular in what I say in my wishes after this. Peas-blossom is mighty exact in her way of doing things, and she won't do anything to oblige me, I know."

By crawling along the shady side of the wall, he at last got to the lane all right; from the lane to the meadows was easy, and then he found himself in the woods.

Here he enjoyed himself immensely, for he loved the woods, and all the living creatures in them. Not that he was kind to them, for he kept pelting a poor squirrel till it sought refuge on the very top of a tall fir.

"I wish I was up beside you," said Tom, and he half-expected to find himself going up like a balloon. But nothing of the kind. Nothing at all happened, and then Tom remembered that he had used up his wish for

that day, and that it was no use wishing anything more till to-morrow.

Still, as he wandered through the woods, he kept on wishing all manner of strange things, and above all he tried to make up his mind what he would wish for the first thing when he awoke next morning.

CHAPTER II.

THE WARMING-PAN.

SHARPLY at six o'clock, the Doctor called for Peters, the gardener, to come round and open the Carcer. He was anxious to see how his new punishment was going to succeed. He longed very earnestly to find Tom subdued and penitent.

Peters was not a little proud of having charge of the huge key of the prison; but any boy with a copy-book could have told him that "Pride will have a fall". Only he didn't need any schoolboy to tell him, for when he had pompously swung open the

heavy door, and had seen that the place was empty, his pride suddenly disappeared.

"There's nobody there, sir," he stammered.

The Doctor stepped in without a word. There was no place where Tom could be hiding. The table was solid and screwed down; the chair was solid, and stood close beside the table. There was certainly no human being within—unless we count the picture-gallery, which the Doctor now examined through his eye-glasses.

"Peters," said he sternly, "bring me a ladder."

The ladder was soon brought, and didn't it creak under the Doctor's massive body, as he carefully examined the two cross bars at the window.

"Peters," still more sternly, "go to my study and wait till I come."

This was exactly what the Doctor would have said to a boy who had got into a scrape. Peters knew the tone well, and altogether did not like the look of things. Queerer things *had* happened.

A few minutes later, the Doctor sat in his study before the table with the big round bay in it, made to fit his person. Before the table, cap in hand, stood the trembling Peters.

"Peters," began the Doctor, "you have been in my service almost eight years now, and my only complaint against you up till now has been excessive severity towards the boys. What do you mean, sir, by thus conniving at this abuse of my Carcer, sir?"

The Doctor had begun quietly, but as he went on his temper and his voice rose. Peters could only mumble out:

"I dunno nothink about how the young varmint got out. He ain't no fren' o' mine, Hammond ain't."

"He was securely locked in. You have had in your possession during the whole period of his incarceration the only key that can open the prison; the iron bars of the window have not been tampered with; he must have made his exit by the door—who opened it?"

Peters only looked helplessly at the huge key, which still dangled in his right hand.

"Did you allow the key out of your sight during any period of this afternoon?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, it ain't just the kin' o' key you wears in your weskit pocket," replied Peters, beginning a grin at his own wit, a grin that came to a sudden end when he caught his master's eye. With renewed solemnity he went on: "An' I did leave it hangin' in our kitchen; but you know, sir, the boys are far more frighteneder for my missus nor for me."

This was true; and besides, Peters' story seemed genuine enough. Above all, the Doctor had had time to cool, and his naturally kindly nature took pity on the distressed gardener.

"That'll do just now, Peters; I may want you when Hammond turns up."

Not long after this, Tom sneaked into the playground. It was just five minutes to six on his watch—but who ever thinks of be-

lieving a schoolboy's watch! Tom had some sort of vague idea of being about when the prison door was opened, and slipping in behind the jailer, and so escaping the terrible consequences of his rash act. The crowd round the prison soon convinced him that all hope was gone.

In a moment he was surrounded by eager faces, all wanting to know how he had done it.

"Won't you catch it, my young prison-breaker!" sneered Smithson, who was still angry at the loss of that shilling.

"How did you manage it, Hammond?" demanded Ralston, not without a touch of admiration in his tone. He had won the shilling, you remember.

Before they had time to observe how puzzled Tom was, Peters came down upon the group, forgetting all his usual caution in his eagerness to clear himself with the Doctor.

"Hammond, you're to go to the study directly," he croaked; "an' if I was you I'd—"

It will never be known what he'd have

done, for the boys came to their senses at this appearance of bullying, and Peters had to flee.

Tom did not need any guide to the study—he had been there before. He knew all about it, so without a word to anyone he pushed on. He wanted to have the thing over and done with.

“Well, Hammond,” began the Doctor, not unkindly, “this is rather a serious business. Now, I do hope you will be quite open about it. Who was your accomplice?”

“Nobody, sir.”

“In that case, how did you manage to get out?”

“I don’t really know, sir. I just found myself outside the door.”

“Ah, recalcitrant, I see. Let me tell you that your silence will not save Stedman. If you don’t confess I shall order him up to receive the same as you.”

Now Stedman was Tom’s particular chum. They were seldom out of trouble, and it was nearly always a trouble in which they had

an equal interest. All the more reason that Stedman should not suffer in one of the few cases where he was innocent. To be sure, the balloon that had cost Tom so dear was one of Stedman's belongings—but that didn't count at this stage of the scrape. Tom had to speak up.

“But, sir, that wouldn't be fair. Stedman knows nothing about it at all.”

“He'll be none the worse of what he is going to get,” replied the Doctor grimly.

“But he's done nothing, sir,” cried Tom in distress. “In fact, the truth is that when the fairy—Peas-blossom, you remember, sir, in Shakespeare—came down the sunbeam into the Carcer, she—”

The Doctor got purple with rage. His face was always red, and when he was angry it got redder; but this was a very special anger, and even the superlative of red wouldn't do. So he got purple.

“You young jackanapes! You break my prison, and then laugh in my face! I meant to try kindness this time, but kind-

ness is thrown away on a hardened nature like yours."

He rang the bell. I need not go into the details of what followed. But if I had been one of the Directors of the Company with which Dr. Ackwork's life was insured, I would have been very anxious for a little while. Indeed, I think life assurance companies would be wise if they agreed among themselves never to pay anything to the friends of fat schoolmasters who die of apoplexy in the act of caning. At the very least they should put fat schoolmasters among those whose lives are called "extra hazardous".

But the Doctor didn't have apoplexy this time. On the contrary, he had enough energy left to give Stedman his share. Not a fair half, of course, for Tom had got all the sparkle of the effort, but quite enough to send Stedman off to the dormitory in a very precarious state of temper.

"I say, Tubs" (I regret to say that this was Tom's name in private life at Willowbank: Stedman was "Bunker"), began Sted-

man, "what did you tell Old Beetroot (again I regret: this time it is the Doctor) that he gave me the warming-pan too?"

"Poor old Bunker!" began Tom sympathetically; "what a ridiculous old wife Beetroot is!"

"But how did you get out, old man? I'm dying to know. None of the fellows have the least idea. They all think I sneaked the key. I wish I had. Then I'd feel as if I had deserved this—Oh!—have you any vinegar, Tubs?"

After the two friends had shared their sorrows and their vinegar, the subject of the escape once more came up.

"Oh, I'll tell you right enough, Bunker. But mum's the word, mind you. The other fellows would never stop chaffing if they knew."

"Did I ever split?—did you ever hear a whisper of—"

"No, no, Bunker, old man," cried Tom, interrupting the indignant protest of his friend; "you have been a bully chum, as

true as steel—so I've no fear in telling you about it. I had been in about half time, I should think, when the fairy came down—"

"What fairy?" snuffed Bunker, angrily.

"Peas-blossom, you remember, in Shakespeare."

"Yes, I remember. But what has she got to do with it?"

"I don't know—all I know is she gave me three wishes, and—"

"Oh, yes, and the cow jumped over the moon. And where's 'oor ickle pinafore?—Goo! goo! goo! goo! What do you take me for?"

Bunker was in nearly as big a rage as the Doctor.

"But I tell you, Bunker, I was too smart for her, and I made—"

"Maybe you were too smart for her, but you aren't too smart for me. Why didn't you bring your nurse with you? You and your fairies!"

"But I say—"

"Get out with you! Go to bed and be

ashamed of yourself. If you can't trust an old chum you can get a new one. I'm done with you."

"But, Bunker—"

"If you want to fight, you know the place to-morrow."

"But it's the truth I—"

"Shut up, or I'll tell the other fellows, and get them to chivy you for a sneak."

Bunker was evidently in earnest, so poor Tom crawled into bed and lay stiff and sore, thinking how dear he had bought this day's wish, and still wondering what he should wish for to-morrow.

His heart was sore as well as his body, for he really was very fond of Bunker. So he changed his mind about his first wish for to-morrow. Instead of wishing that "all those pains were away", he made up his mind that the very first thing he would do when he awoke would be to wish that he and Bunker should be as good friends as ever.

Comforted with this thought, he was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER III.

IN COVENTRY.

TOM thought he had been sleeping only a couple of minutes, though it must have been a couple of hours, when he suddenly awoke feeling very cold. He had a queer sensation of swaying about too, and there was a strange whishing sound in his ears.

When he tried to sit up he nearly tumbled, and when he gripped something to steady himself he felt his fingers pricked all over. By this time he was wide awake, and knew that he was in the open air, for he saw the moon shining and the stars twinkling above, and felt the wind playing with his night-shirt.

His first thought was that this was a practical joke of Bunker's to pay him out after the quarrel, but a moment or two's reflection showed that this was absurd. For in the clear moonlight he found himself

perched on the very top of a tall tree, and nobody could have thrown him up there.

Could he have been walking in his sleep? Tom remembered stories of the wonderful things people sometimes did in the way of climbing while still sound asleep. But he knew that he couldn't have climbed so high as this without scratching himself very severely, and tearing his shirt. Now both shirt and fingers were quite whole, except the few pricks he had just felt.

As he gazed around in astonishment, he gradually began to recognize where he was. At first he was very unwilling to believe it, but bit by bit it was forced upon him that he was in the middle of the Wandrage Woods—and two miles from school! Instinctively he put down his hands to examine his feet: they were soft and clean and unhurt. Certainly he had not walked from the school, sleeping or waking.

He tried hard not to think of it, but the harder he tried to put the thought away the more it pressed upon him that this was the

very tree he had wished to be at the top of yesterday.

So this was Peas-blossom's mean revenge, he thought. She meant to grant all his wishes, but at the most inconvenient times. However, there was no good considering this question just now. His first business was to get down out of this dangerous place.

By the time he reached the ground he was bleeding all over, and his shirt hung in rags about him. He was a good climber, but the best climber would not have liked the job he had just done.

Even in the wood, walking barefoot was not easy for a boy accustomed to the luxury of boots. The ground itself was soft enough, but here and there Tom stumbled upon prickly shrubs and trod upon fir-cones.

Arrived at the public road, he found that nearly two miles yet remained to be done. At first he tried to rig up a pair of temporary boots by means of a bundle of grass and leaves tied together with strips of night-shirt. This did splendidly for a couple of

minutes. Then the left bundle burst. When it was repaired and Tom had once more started, the right gave way. After a few more trials he threw away his bundles and plodded steadily and painfully on, wishing heartily that his mother had allowed him to go barefoot like the little village boys—they would have thought nothing of this midnight ramble that was so cruel for him.

At length Tom stood at the front gate of the school. There was no good in sneaking behind at that time of night. Nobody was awake, and the wall behind was protected by a fringe of cut glass.

There was no cut glass on the front gate, but there was something behind it that might have been much more dangerous. For there stood the school dog, a huge mastiff that Dr. Ackwork called Ponto, but was known to all the boys as "Loc", being short for "Locum tenens".

Fortunately Tom was on first-rate terms with the brute, so when he heard its deep

breathing behind the gate he had nothing to do but say:

“O-ho, Loc, good dog!” to get a friendly growl in reply.

It was hard work getting up to the top of that gate. It wasn't a decent iron gate, built as if its one end was to be climbed over. It was a perfectly plain wooden gate, with no iron about it except a nice row of spikes along the top. It gave absolutely no foothold, being as smooth as glass. By the help of the knob of the postern-door, and a couple of cracks in the stone posts at the side, and at the expense of much effort and some blood, Tom at last got to the top. In coming over clinging to the big stone ball at the head of the side-post, he missed his catch with his left foot, tore a deep gash in his thigh with one of the spikes, and found himself hanging loose with his arms round the stone ball, and his toes four feet from the ground.

Fortunately he had tumbled over on the inner side. There was nothing for it but to

let himself go, and bruise his feet worse than ever. When he picked himself up from the gravelly ground he felt very sore, but very safe. For all the rest was easy. He and Loc made for the wash-house window, that had no catch. Here they parted company, Loc returning to the playground, Tom passing from the wash-house to the pantry, from the pantry to the first corridor, from that to the hall. The way upstairs was then easy, and Tom's dormitory, though locked, was always locked on the outside. He simply turned the key and walked in.

The September moon had served Tom bravely up till now, and it helped him still more as he dressed his wounds as best he could. After he had washed himself as well as the fear of waking his chums would permit, he sneaked out a clean night-shirt from his locker and crept into bed.

Next morning he was sore all over, and his clean night-shirt had one or two suspicious red marks; but what troubled Tom most was the fear of having the really bad shirt

discovered. So, as soon as morning lessons were over, he slunk away to the Shanelagh Mere, and there pulled off his jacket and vest. Underneath was the tell-tale shirt wrapped round his chest. To tie a big stone in it was the work of a moment, and as Tom watched the big rings spreading out over the place where it had disappeared, he felt as if a great load had fallen from his shoulders.

It was only on the way back that he thought it strange that he had managed to slip away so quietly without anyone noticing him, and wanting to accompany him. He was not to be left very long without an explanation.

When he got back to the playground he found that all the fellows carefully avoided him. Gradually it dawned upon him that he, the popular Tom, had been sent to Coventry. Why, he could not at first make out, but when he thought it over he came to the true conclusion that he was suspected of getting Bunker into a scrape in the vain at-

tempt to screen himself in the affair of the prison.

This was hard to bear, but at the time Tom did not feel it so much as he did afterwards. For in the meantime he was mainly concerned in removing all traces of his midnight escapade, since if it were found out it would be a case of expulsion. Mere thrashings Tom could stand as part of a liberal education, but he drew the line at expulsion. So next morning Tom's sister Ettie, a young lady of twenty, received an envelope from Tom, containing two letters from him—one an ordinary school letter to be shown to the parents, the other intended only for Ettie.

The parents' letter was in ordinary black ink. Ettie's letter began in a dirty red ink, but ended in black like the other. Here it is:

DEAR ETTIE,—You might send me a new night-shirt. My other one is all torn to pieces climbing down a high tree. I am all cut, and I had the warming-pan yesterday besides, and if my night-shirt is lost I'll get it again, and I never yelled before, but I think I would yell this time with the cuts I have. You can prove how cut I am by the blood which writes this

but blood is not like ink for when I put water in it it isnt soft again and wont write so I have taken the ink again for it is to sore to squeeze for new blood. You were always a brick and won't tell the mater.—
Your affec. brother
TOM.

P.S. Maybe you would be better to put the shirt into a hamper to make it easier sent.

As soon as this letter had been despatched, Tom had the whole afternoon to himself. He wandered down to the meadows, alone, of course, and seeking out a soft place lay down very, very gently among the long grass, and thought out the whole matter.

He began to see how the thing was going to work. Midnight was evidently the beginning of each twenty-four hours, and all his wishes were evidently kept up in their proper order till their day came.

He knew that he had wished a great many things yesterday, and he would have given a great deal to know in what order he had wished them. But he could remember nothing about this, and would have just to take the wishes as they came, which might be exceedingly inconvenient.

Suddenly one of his wishes came clearly before his mind, a wish that had a very mixed effect on him. At first he felt inclined to laugh at the prospect of seeing it realized, but second thoughts showed him the awfulness of the wish, and he bitterly wished with all his heart that he could un-wish the unfortunate wish. But this was no use; so poor Tom had to content himself with resolving not to wish a single other wish till all his present wishes were granted. When all those were past he could keep his wishes in order, one for each day, so that he could have them attended to at once, instead of having to take his wishes at midnight.

By and by he fell asleep among the grass, and when he awoke he was sorer than ever. Every bone in his body seemed to ache. By the time he got back to school he looked almost as ill as he felt, and when he asked leave to go to bed at once, it was readily granted.

Next morning he felt no better, yet tried to take a little interest in what was going

on around him, particularly when he noticed that all his class-mates got into a great stew just before being put on to construe.

It was Mr. Morell who took the class, and he himself seemed a little bit annoyed as he came in.

“Willis, you begin.”

“I—I—I’m sorry, sir, but I’ve mislaid my *Vergil*, and can’t find it anywhere.”

“Careless, as usual. Take Simpson’s, and go on.”

“I’m very sorry, sir,” broke in Simpson, “mine is lost too, sir.”

Mr. Morell looked keenly at the two, seemed satisfied at their evident distress, and asked Straton to go on. Then it came out that there was not a *Vergil* in the class. They all expected Mr. Morell to get into a great wax; so Simpson, who was a steady worker, began apologetically:

“If you let me look on your book, sir, I shall construe at once. We do know our work, sir, and can’t understand what has come over our books.”

At this all eyes were turned upon Tom as the probable author of this trouble. It looked quite like the act of an outcast, who wanted to be avenged on the whole class.

But Mr. Morell, a little shamefacedly, replied:

"I can't make it out at all, boys; for my *Vergil*—or rather my *Vergils*, for I have half a dozen of them—has disappeared too. This" (holding up the book he had brought in) "is a *Cæsar* that I brought in to keep up—eh, that is, by mistake."

After puzzling for a minute, Mr. Morell sent Straton across to the Doctor to borrow a *Vergil*. It was some little time before the boy returned, and when he did come his face was very red and very long. It was red because the Doctor had scolded him; it was long because he had to report that the Doctor's *Vergils* were all gone too.

Before they had time to recover from their astonishment, the Doctor himself puffed in.

"Very remarkable circumstance this, Mr. Morell, very remarkable; but we'll get to the

bottom of it." Here his eyes rested threateningly on Tom. "Meanwhile send over to the store-room for a dozen of the little White's *Vergils*, Book I."

When the messenger returned with the alarming news that there was not a single *Vergil* in the whole store-room, things began to look very black indeed. As the search went on all over the school, Tom, try as he would, could not help looking as if he knew more than he cared to tell.

The result was that he found himself once more in front of that dreadful table in the Doctor's room.

"Now, tell me what you know about this robbery." The doctor laid awful stress on this last word. "I'm afraid this time it is a case beyond birching."

Tom knew that if he spoke of the fairy again he would get the warming-pan the same as last time, so he held his tongue. But the Doctor got angry at this stubbornness, and stormed at Tom, who was forced to say something:

"Well, you wouldn't believe me last time when I spoke about Peas-blossom, sir."

The Doctor's face got red again, and again the bell rang. The same dreary business had to be gone through, but in the very middle of it the bell rang again—this time very wildly.

When Betsy answered it she was hurried off to bring Mrs. Stradwell, the housekeeper. When she arrived all breathless she found Tom lying senseless on the floor, with the Doctor standing over him in the utmost distress. Peters was looking gloomily on.

Mrs. Stradwell, without paying any heed to the two men, at once took Tom in hand, and soon brought him round. As soon as Tom's eyes opened the Doctor began apologetically:

"I cannot understand it at all. He's often had twice as much, and never so much as groaned. Isn't that so, Peters?" turning to the gardener for corroboration.

"Reg'lar, sir; an' this time, too, he didn't say a—"

Here Mrs. Stradwell interrupted Peters by ordering him to carry Tom up to the "extra" room. They did not like to call it the "infirmary"—but the boys did.

By and by the Doctor was called up to "see his handiwork", as Mrs Stradwell said to herself. When the Doctor appeared she took care to say nothing at all; but she showed him some things on Tom's body that made the master's blood run cold. How was he to know that all those cuts and bruises were there quite independent of his cane? No wonder that the housekeeper thought the Doctor had been brutal, and no wonder that the Doctor agreed with her.

There was no sleep for the Doctor that night. He was often irritable with his boys, but never cruel. He had a naturally warm heart, and only punished from a sense of duty. So you may imagine his horror at finding himself reduced to the level of a vulgar, brutal flogger.

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE SCHOLARSHIP.

EARLY next morning the Doctor stood at Tom's bedside, and was glad to find him looking well and sleeping quite soundly. The master quietly sat down and waited for the boy's awakening.

The bell rang for prayers, but as soon as they were over the Doctor returned to the bedside. Being left to himself Tom slept right on till ten o'clock, when he awoke with a most healthy yawn, and a healthier appetite. The Doctor was soon reassured as to the state of the patient.

When the story of the cuts was told (Tom carefully avoiding all mention of Peasblossom) the Doctor's conscience was cleared, and his anger was roused against the boy who had, however innocently, cost him a night's rest and the good opinion of his housekeeper. He kept his temper suffi-

ciently, however, to order Tom to get up and go to class immediately.

When the Doctor left, Tom's first feeling was one of satisfaction that Peas-blossom had let him have one night in peace. His next was a burning desire to know what the wish for this day was. Everything seemed the same as usual, and Tom began to be a little frightened that his wishes were no longer to be attended to. Then he took comfort in the thought that if this were so, the awful wish that he wished unwished would no longer have any terrors for him.

He went carelessly through his work that forenoon. He had no interest in anything, not even in the indignant scowl with which Mr. Morell received his Latin Version, long before any of the other fellows (who really could write Versions—Tom couldn't) had more than half done.

A listless morning was followed by a listless recess, and the afternoon promised to be more listless still. It was a half-holiday for everybody but Tom: the Doctor's

wrath having taken the form of cutting off Tom's afternoon to make up for the morning in bed. Tom had just settled himself to cram up some Antiquities, when he was disturbed by the overfamiliar cry:

"Hammond!"

It was Mr. Morell, who, coming into the empty school-room, took his place at the desk and waved Tom to come up to him.

Mr. Morell was above all things fair. Favouritism, that unpardonable sin amongst boys, was as hateful to him as to them. Even lazy Tom, to whom the master was none too pleasant, liked him.

That afternoon Tom approached the master's desk in the full expectation of getting what he called a "wiggling" for that morning's Version, but beyond that he suspected no immediate danger. To his surprise Mr. Morell did not begin to scold, but in his chilliest tones told Tom to go to the Doctor's room. He was wanted.

Tom stood amazed, half-inclined to make some sort of protest. But the master, notic-

ing Tom's hesitation, simply repeated his order in the same freezing style, and left the room.

Arrived at his old place before the Doctor's table, Tom was a little astonished at his unusual solemnity. It was not to be expected that the headmaster should be jocular; but Tom, who had had plenty of opportunities of seeing him grave, had never seen him so grave as now. It was evidently something very serious this time, and the unsuspecting boy had no idea what it might be.

"What have you to say to this, Hammond?"

Tom here recognized his Version in the Doctor's hand, and felt positively relieved that it was no worse. It was only to be a *poena* after all. What he thought was:

"The Doctor's gout's bad; he's going to make a fuss about this Version." What he said was:

"I'm very sorry, sir; but really I could not help it."

"Could not help it, sir?" The Doctor's

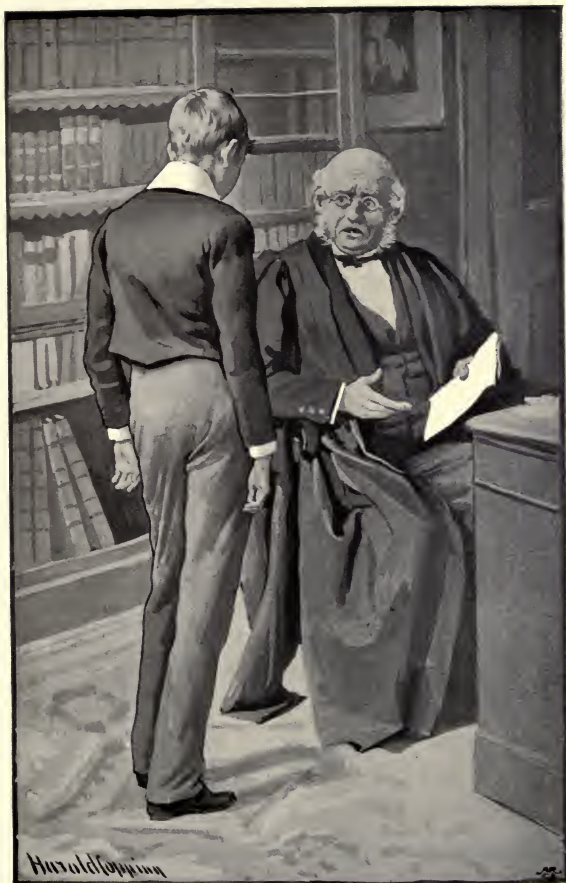
tones were awful. "Do you mean to tell me that you couldn't help—"

"No, sir," interrupted Tom boldly; "I was tired, and my head didn't seem to work right. I couldn't use the dictionary. I remember now, that I didn't turn up a single word."

"That, at least, I can believe," replied the Doctor grimly. "So you were so tired and ill that you could not help making a perfect translation, sir, a perfect translation—in the finest Tacitean style, which is *not* taught at Willowbank. My boy, this is a much more serious thing than you seem to think—it's dishonesty of the basest kind. Where is the key, sir? I did not know there was one to these Versions, or I wouldn't have introduced the book. How did you get it?"

"I give you my word of honour, sir, that I have no key," replied Tom fearlessly, and a little indignantly.

"Then who helped you?" demanded the Doctor sternly; then added as if to himself, "None of our boys could have done it, even though that *velim* is doubtful."



"I did it all myself; I got help from no—"

Before he could get out the "body", a sudden flash of memory told him that one of his many wishes had been to make a perfect Version, just to see what Morell would say. And now he knew, and yet he was not happy.

All his pride and indignation were gone. He stood guiltily before his judge in sudden confusion, the unfinished denial dying away on his lips.

"Who was your accomplice in this contemptible act?" thundered the Doctor.

Tom had a clear memory of what had happened the last time he had depended on the story of Peas-blossom, so he thought it undesirable to introduce her again into the discussion. He knew he was now "in for it" whatever happened, but he would try a new denial.

"I give you my word of honour, sir, that I got no help, either from a book or from any human being."

This at least was true, and had it not

been for Tom's guilty breakdown in his first denial, the manly and truthful ring in his voice would have made the Doctor hesitate; but now it was like a counsel putting in a plea of "not guilty" for a prisoner who has already confessed the crime.

The Doctor did not press the demand for Tom's accomplice. That, he felt, was not the right thing to ask from a high-spirited boy. Indeed, his explanation of Tom's sudden renewal of his denial was that the boy had just remembered that confession would involve his ally in the trouble.

So he urged Tom to confess his own share in the affair, and bear his punishment like a man. As to the confession, Tom was obdurate; and as to the punishment, nobody could complain of his ever failing to bear that like a man.

Then the Doctor took a line of argument that was very, very hard for Tom to bear. He pointed out the meanness of a boy taking advantage of his master's kindness to deceive that master. Because Tom had found the

Doctor at his bedside that morning anxious about his health, he must go off and presume upon that kindness to escape the punishment for a cowardly theft. After the faint of last night it would be most unlikely that there would be any caning to-day, so Tom must take advantage of this to do things that deserved the cane—and much more of the same most exasperating sort, for an honest though somewhat lazy boy.

By and by Tom could stand it no longer. He began to explain about his Wishes again, and again the Doctor became purple. But a sudden change came over him, and with a scared look in his eyes the master said quite kindly:

“Oh, yes, I remember,—Peas-blossom; tell me all about her.”

Tom was delighted at this satisfactory change, and opened out quite freely into a complete account of his dealings with the fairy. When he was done, the Doctor put a few questions to the boy, which were answered in the most satisfactory way. Tom

was a little astonished that no more was said about the Version, but he was not exactly sorry.

The Doctor, in fact, talked of a great many subjects that seemed to have no connection with anything, and when the talk was done he patted Tom on the shoulder in the friendliest way, and said they would need to see that Peas-blossom did no more mischief. In the meantime, Tom was to go off and enjoy as much of the afternoon as was left.

That night the Doctor wrote a long letter to his old friend Dr. Cerebrerr.

As for Tom, he was a little anxious about what would happen during the night. He didn't want Peas-blossom to catch him in his night-shirt again. Of course, he didn't know whether his next day's wish meant a journey or not. He could not remember; but he determined to make sure. So, after the other fellows had gone to bed and were sound asleep, he slipped out of bed and put on all his clothes, and lay down again, with

only the coverlet over him—ready, boots and all, for any journey that might lie before him.

When he awoke he was astonished to find himself still in bed, but more astonished to find the Doctor bending over him. The coverlet had fallen off during the night, and the Doctor was more astonished even than Tom, when he saw the boy fully dressed.

“So, Hammond, you were too lazy last night to take off your clothes?”

“No, sir; but I have wished to be so many places, and if Peas-blossom gets the chance, she’ll drop me—”

“Just so, my boy; but you see she hasn’t come. It’s only six o’clock now, so you’d better take off your clothes and have a good sleep. You needn’t come down to prayers to-day; you’re tired, I’m sure.”

Here were many things that Tom could not understand. First, why was the Doctor there so early in the morning? Secondly, why was he not angry at finding him all

dressed in bed? Thirdly, why had Peas-blossom sent no wish for the day?

However, he soon fell asleep again, and when the other fellows got up he lay still and thought it all out. It was only then that he remembered that it was Sunday. So that was why he had had no wish that morning. Sunday was Peas-blossom's own wishing-day.

What a Sunday that was for poor Tom! To be in Coventry is always a distressing thing for an eager, mischievous boy, but on a dull Sunday it is intolerable. And it was a rigorous "Coventry" too, not a being would even look at him. For this morning's incident had confirmed the bad impression already made by Tom's apparent blabbing about Bunker. To the crime of sneaking was now added that of "shamming", to get off from prayers and church.

Tom wandered through the meadows alone, and was miserable. Then he came into the big empty school-room, took up an "improving" book, and was more miserable. After

that he wandered about thinking of that awful wish that he wished unwished, and was most miserable.

When night came he sneaked into bed, the most miserable boy in the world; and no doubt Peas-blossom was glad, and no doubt she chuckled—that is, if fairies ever do chuckle.

CHAPTER V.

DR. CEREBRERR.

ON Monday morning Tom awoke in a dreadful mess. His bed was all over jam and suet!

At first he thought the “fellows” had done it in a practical joke. But then he reflected that jam was not the thing the “fellows” would care to waste in jokes. If it had been blacking, now, he could have understood it—or soap.

Then he remembered that among his wishes had been “a great big roly-poly all to myself”.

He had not had sense to wish for a plate along with it, so Peas-blossom had just sent it loose. It had likely come at midnight as usual, and poor Tom had mashed it all over the place, in turning over in bed.

Prayers were over, and school begun, before the disgraceful state of Tom's bed was reported to the Doctor. Of course Tom was sent for, and as he stood before that well-known desk, he looked in vain for the kindly look he had seen of late in the Doctor's eyes. Instead, there was a strange mixture of anger, suspicion, and anxiety in the master's expression. Anger, however, had the first place.

"Where did you get that jam and trash, sir, that you have made such a disgraceful mess with? Did you steal it from the pantry, or did you break bounds to buy it?"

"I didn't steal it, sir; it was there when I awoke. If I had known, I would have eaten it, sir."

Tom had such an ill-used air, and his tone of regret was so sincere when he spoke of

missing the eating of the jam, that the Doctor was staggered.

"Where could it have come from?" he asked, half to himself. "A trick of the others, I suspect."

"Oh, I know," answered Tom briskly. "It's that mean Peas-blossom taking advantage of my being asleep—"

"Yes, yes," replied the Doctor irritably, and with a curious glance at Tom, "I suppose that's it. But, my young man, if that isn't it, you'll be sorry for it—very sorry."

Tom did not at all understand the exceedingly grim expression on the Doctor's face as he said these words, but he did understand the permission to go back to his class, a permission of which he very quickly availed himself.

That afternoon a note was handed to Mr. Morell at class, and he could hardly restrain a smile as he came out with the well-known words:

"Hammond, you're to go to the Doctor's—you're wanted."

It was with genuine indignation that Tom

arose to obey this stern command. He felt that this was carrying the thing too far. Life was not worth living under this continual strain of being "wanted".

Arrived at the study, and knocking, he was surprised to get no reply. The Doctor's "come in" was usually loud enough to be heard at the end of the corridor. But this time there was no sound at all. A great fear came over Tom—could that awful wish that he wished unwished have— But his anxiety was dispelled by the appearance of Betsy, who told him that the Doctor was not there, but in the drawing-room.

Now Tom was in a quandary. All his important appointments with the Doctor had, up till now, been kept in the study—where they could have that calm and privacy so necessary to the delicate work they had in hand. He got out of the difficulty by asking Betsy to tell the Doctor that he was waiting. To Betsy's surprise, and Tom's amazement, the message came back that Tom was to come to the drawing-room:

“And, Betsy, bring some tea for him.”

When Tom entered he was delighted to find everything so different from what he had expected, and from what he was in the habit of finding in his interviews with the Doctor. The Master smiled and joked, the Master's wife sat and beamed on Tom, and a visitor—a tall, white-faced, black-haired, beardless man—was quite interested in the boy.

The talk gradually came round to the Wandrage Woods, and squirrels. The stranger seemed to know a great deal about trees and squirrels, but Tom was quite equal to him, and gave at least as much information as he got.

Then the Doctor spoke about Peas-blossom. At first Tom did not care to say anything, but, as they all seemed to be quite interested and serious, he soon started, and gave them the whole story. The stranger tried to pick holes in the story by going over it and seeking to make Tom contradict himself, but he couldn't manage it.

Tom was enjoying himself very much, when the conversation suddenly took a very uncomfortable turn for him. The stranger began to put some of those puzzling arithmetical quibbles that visitors seem to think the right thing to entertain schoolboys with. Tom answered as well as he could, and consoled himself by eating as much as possible from the dainty little cake-basket that lay on the small table at his elbow, and all the time he could hardly enjoy the dainties for wondering why somebody didn't find fault.

By and by he was sent off to take a walk, but, as he had eaten far too much to be comfortable, he just went to the meadows, lay down, and was soon fast asleep.

While Tom was lying happily there among the grass, the Doctor was busy writing the following letter to Mr. Hammond.

WILLOWBANK SCHOOL, WANDRAGE,
22nd September, 1890.

DEAR SIR,—It is with the deepest regret that I communicate to you the melancholy intelligence that there is indubitable evidence of mental aberration on the part of your son, Thomas. Naturally, his com-

panions were the first to observe it, with the result that they, one and all, refuse to have any intercourse with him. My attention was specially directed to him through certain boyish extravagances, which in themselves deserved no further notice than the caning they earned. It was his *explanations* that aroused my suspicions. He accounted for all his escapades by a reference to fairy agency—particularly the Shakespearian Peas-blossom. At first grieved at what I considered a piece of boyish impertinence, I soon became alarmed at the pertinacity with which he clung to his stories, and the consistency with which he told them. Finally, convinced by certain observations of his conduct, that there was something seriously wrong, I sent for the celebrated physician, my friend, Dr. Cerebrerr, from the asylum at Wanderpark.

After the most careful investigation he is of opinion that your son is labouring under a mental derangement quite abnormal at his time of life. The *idée fixe* has never, in Dr. Cerebrerr's very wide experience, before been found associated with so few years, as in your son's case.

He is inclined to believe that the exciting cause of this disease is the over-pressure of school studies of which we hear so much just now. But on this point I cannot agree with him; for the holidays are so recent that there has been no time for such a cause to act, and really, looking at the work your son did during the past session, there can be no reasonable doubt that, in his case at least, there has been no undue brain strain.

I trust that you will approve of the action I have taken, and that you will at once communicate to me your wishes as to our further proceedings in this painful matter.—I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

JOSEPH ACKWORK.

In plain English, they all thought that Tom was mad.

It cost the kindly doctor a great deal to post this terrible letter. It lay in his desk all that night, and it was only in the morning that he found heart to despatch it.

CHAPTER VI.

TREASURE TROVE.

WHILE it was still dark on Tuesday morning, Tom awoke with the feeling of having a weight upon his breast. Putting up his hand, he found that the pressure was caused by a coarse bag filled with something very heavy. There was no room to doubt what this was. Tom trembled with delight. This time, at least, his wish had brought un-

mixed happiness—for here he had the “bag of money” that he had wished for.

His first feeling of joy, however, soon passed away, and gave place to a great uneasiness. Where was he to put all this money? He could not trust it in his locker, for, like all schoolboys, he had the firm belief that all the school servants had skeleton keys that opened every lock in the dormitory. He couldn't carry about a great heavy load like this in his pockets. He made up his mind that he would bury it in a fine place that he knew of in the Wandrage Woods. Besides, it seemed the right thing to do with a bag of gold—everybody in Tom's story-books buried their gold.

But just here a horrible thought flashed across Tom's mind: What if it was not gold after all? He remembered that he had only wished for a “bag of money”—it would be quite like Peas-blossom to make it all coppers! It was too dark to see what sort of coin they were, but Tom's heart leaped with joy when, on putting in his hand, he found that some

at least of the money was milled round the edges—so he was sure it must be at anyrate silver.

For the present he was satisfied, and, putting the bag under his pillow, he tried to sleep. But sleep was out of the question. He lay awake, wondering what he would do with all this money. At first his thoughts were of the happiest, but soon his joy was overclouded. Difficulties sprang up on every hand. Money, he found, was not everything. It was true that he had enough money under his pillow to buy a pony, but where could he keep it when bought? He could afford to go to the circus every day for a year, but where was he to get his circus?

How, indeed, was he to spend any at all of his fortune? The only shops were at Wandrage Town, and Wandrage Town was out of bounds; so that, even though the school was not yet working full time, he could not make use of the long evening that was left free, to spend any of his new wealth.

By and by he began to think that it might be awkward to get the bag out of bed in the morning, without the other fellows seeing it. So he sneaked out and stuffed the bag into his locker. When he had crept back to bed he became uneasy lest any of the fellows should play off some joke with his locker, and had more than half a mind to get up and put the bag under his pillow again.

Poor Tom was already feeling the cares of wealth.

He was up long before anyone else next morning and managed to get a look at his treasure. The money was of all sorts—gold, silver, and copper. Naturally, he began to pick out the gold coins, but the chinking of the money seemed to disturb some of the boys. At anyrate, Tom heard someone moving and grunting something, so he very quietly pocketed the seven gold coins that he had managed to separate from the others, and pushed back the bag to the very corner of his locker. Seven sovereigns seemed to him inexhaustible wealth.

In his joy he forgot that he was in Coventry, and made the fatal mistake of talking to Bunker, as they were washing.

"I say, Bunker, are you game to break bounds this afternoon. I've got—"

It was only here that he noticed Bunker's stony stare; then he felt mad at himself for forgetting. There is nothing that delights a boy more than to be spoken to by another who is in Coventry. Bunker was as happy as Tom was miserable.

Already much of the charm had disappeared from this wealth that he found he must enjoy alone. Tom felt inclined to pay his whole bag of money down for a renewal of Bunker's friendship; but he knew well that Bunker's friendship was not a thing to be bought and sold.

Now it was different with Snaffles. *He* had no ideals. He loved his ease, and he loved sweets—and there his loves began and ended. When Tom showed him a sovereign his eyes sparkled, for he saw unlimited possibilities in the way of dainties; but at the

mention of the town his face clouded, for that meant exertion and danger.

Snaffles was mortally afraid of the warming-pan, so his poor lean soul was torn by conflicting motives. Dainties on the one hand, danger on the other. In this game of pull dainties, pull danger, danger was decidedly winning, when Tom produced a second sovereign. This was too much for Snaffles. He tremblingly yielded to Tom's blandishments.

As they trudged along to town Snaffles could hardly keep from openly quaking, and could talk of nothing else but their awful plight if they were caught. This conversation was little pleasing to Tom, who wanted to talk about revolvers.

"But we can't eat revolvers," objected Snaffles, who was almost as much frightened at the prospect of revolvers abroad as of the warming-pan at home.

"Who said we could? You beggar, you're always thinking about eating." Tom grew sarcastic: "I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll buy

you a gingerbread pistol at Mother Seegull's—that's about the size of you—yah!"

"If you only brought me here to laugh at me," bleated Snaffles, "I'm going back."

"No, you're not—you're too frightened," sneered Tom; "you'd be afraid to go alone. You're going to hold the target the time I'm shooting at it—that's what you are going to do."

But Tom had gone too far. The timid Snaffles could not stand this prospect, and at the first cross roads bolted as if for his life. Tom's first impulse was to pursue, and he actually did run a little bit, as any respectable schoolboy will when he sees anybody else running; but he soon pulled up, and contented himself with shouting all manner of threats after Snaffles, mentioning the terrible things he would do if that timid one ventured to blab.

As soon as Snaffles saw that he was not pursued he stopped. All exertion was distasteful to him; unnecessary exertion was beyond his comprehension; nothing short of

the prospect of a revolver could make him run. However, he was not vindictive, so he cheerily shouted back a promise that nobody would hear anything from him.

Tom went on his solitary way, not displeased to be alone, after the irritating whining of Snaffles. When he arrived at Wandrage he felt still better pleased at having no one to witness his humiliation; for, when he went into the ironmonger's shop and asked for one of their best Colt's revolvers, the man began to chaff him. At least so Tom thought, though the man was probably trying to do an honest bit of business when he offered the boy his choice of some fine toy cannons.

"This fine brass one, now, all mounted with wheels and tumbril complete, will only cost you half-a-crown. It shoots a ball nearly as big as a marble."

"I want a revolver—not a pop-gun," replied Tom severely.

"But, my little man," (how Tom hated to be called a "little man"—what boy doesn't?) "revolvers cost pounds, not shillings."

"Who said they cost shillings?" was Tom's dogged reply. "I said I wanted a revolver."

Then it came out that the demand for revolvers in that quiet little country town was not sufficiently brisk to encourage the iron-monger to keep "the best kind" in stock. He could get one sent on from Birmingham in a week, if the young gentleman could wait.

But the young gentleman could not wait—he wanted his revolver immediately; so the shopman turned out his stock of old pistols. Tom was mightily taken with a huge, old-fashioned, silver-mounted horse pistol. Here new difficulties arose, however. The man was afraid to sell it, in case it should burst the first time the boy discharged it. Tom made a big offer, but in vain. He raised his offer, and added a promise that he would not fire it, but only keep it for show and for firing "caps". The shopman wavered, but finished by locking away the tempting weapon.

Tom had to content himself with a pair of very small pistols—almost toys. But the

price was big enough to make up for their smallness. The ironmonger was an honest man as things go. He would not gain money by selling a dangerous weapon; but he paid himself for his honesty by charging a sovereign for two pistols worth three-and-sixpence each.

In one way Tom didn't care very much about this overcharge. A sovereign more or less was neither here nor there with him. Hadn't he that bag of money at home, and couldn't he wish for as many more as he liked, as soon as his other wishes were done.

But in another way he found it very inconvenient indeed; for when he had got to Mother Seegull's, and had bought as much of her coarse dainties as he cared for, he had to hand over a sovereign to pay for elevenpence halfpenny worth of eatables. Now, if he had got change at the ironmonger's all would have been well. But Mother Seegull looked on the coin with much distrust. First she banged it down on her counter, then she weighed it up and down in her hand, finally she bit it.

All this time she was watching Tom, who kept himself in countenance by calmly polishing off her wares. By the time she had done with her testing it was too late to think of taking back what she had sold.

"I haven't got change for this," she said in her sour way.

"A nice woman to keep a shop, you are," retorted Tom; "but I'll owe you the elevenpence halfpenny and pay you next time I come back."

Already Tom had got so used to consider himself a rich man that he did not see how suspicious this speech appeared to the shopwoman, who had her snarling answer quite ready:

"No, you won't, my dear, but I'll keep the sovereign till you come back, and then I'll give you change—if it's a good one. If it isn't I'll send it up to the schoolmaster. How will that do, hey?"

Here a great fear came over Tom. How could he know that his sovereigns were true sovereigns. He began to think he remembered

reading somewhere about fairy gold—gold that turned into brass as soon as the fairies were done with it. Mother Seegull ought to know a good sovereign when she saw one, and Mother Seegull was evidently very suspicious. Tom didn't know exactly how many years' imprisonment it meant to be caught passing bad coin. He had a vague idea that his history told him that they used to nail your ears to a barn door if they caught you at it. Somehow, he thought that it wasn't so bad nowadays, but he knew that it was still something very serious, so he shuffled out of the shop in a way that made Mother Seegull quite sure that she was right in her suspicions.

She at once called in her favourite cronies, and they had quite a happy time over the sovereign. But though they banged the coin upon all things they could think of, and more than half ate it among them, they could find no fault in it. However, their testing did Tom this bad turn, that it spread the report through the town that one of the Willow-

bank boys was going about spending sovereigns.

Now Jonas, the gamekeeper, thought this piece of news was of the utmost importance to a man like him that owed such an uncomfortable sum at the "Old Oak".

That was why poor Tom, slinking back to school, happened to meet Jonas, who was pretending to be just coming into the town.

"Hello, younker! Been t' a fun'ral?"

Tom's face was long enough to justify the question. To look at him no one would have thought that he had a whole bag of money at home, to say nothing of a pair of pistols in his jacket pockets, and sweet things bulging out all over him. But he had eaten so much that he shuddered at the very thought of having to appear at supper: besides, his mind was full of the terrible danger in which he found himself.

He tried to dodge past Jonas, but in vain. Jonas' heavy hand fell upon Tom's neck.

"Hands off!" cried Tom gallantly, and

just at that moment, apparently quite by accident, one of the pistols fell upon the road.

“Hello! Wot’s this?” exclaimed Jonas, picking up the weapon, and looking at it admiringly. “Ain’t she a beauty? W’ere did ye get this?”

Tom fell quite simply into Jonas’ trap, and told him all about his desire to get a revolver, and his having to be content with the pistols. It was a comfort to have anyone to talk to, even a natural enemy like a keeper. Nobody yearns for company like a boy in Coventry. Jonas listened a while, then suddenly asked:

“How much have ye left?”

Without the least suspicion, Tom answered truthfully that he had just five pounds left. He said nothing about the bag at home, for he rightly thought that that was none of the keeper’s business.

“Five poun’. Wy, ye can buy a gun for five poun’. Look ’ere, this ’ere gun’s wuth seven poun’ ten at least, if it’s wuth a copper,

but to a plucky young gent like you, I'm blowed if I don't give her for five poun'."

Tom rose grandly to the bait, carefully examining Jonas' handsome double-barrelled breech-loader. To the boy, who knew nothing of the relative values of guns and money, it seemed a decidedly good bargain.

"Is't a do?" asked Jonas.

"But what'll you do without your gun?" asked Tom, whose conscience pricked him at the thought of taking advantage of the gamekeeper to the extent of depriving him of such a necessary weapon.

"Me! Wy, bless ye, I've got three more on 'em up at th' lodge; 'and over th' five poun', an' she's yours."

Tom fished out his five sovereigns, and handed them over, while Jonas loyally passed his gun to the boy. But suddenly the gamekeeper's eyes blazed as he looked at the coins. He seized his gun again, and cried out:

"Don't ye try on any o' yer bloomin' tricks on me—I'm none so easy took in,



"FIVE POUN', YOUNG GENT, AND THE GUN IS YOURS."

not much. Try yer brass suvrings on some bloomin' mole—ye don't come it over me, ye don't."

Tom had nothing to say. It was quite clear now that Peas-blossom was having her mean revenge. He didn't know the laws of Fairyland, Tom didn't, or he would have known that they don't allow cheating. He only hung his head and said nothing.

"Now, 'and over that other pistol. I'll take 'em both back to Tomkins, 'oo's a fren' o' mine, an' I won't see him swindled neither. If yer want yer bloomin' brass fardens, ye can ask your schoolmaster ter write ter me for'm."

Tom meekly handed over the pistol, and slunk away, leaving Jonas very uncomfortable indeed. Not that Jonas was ashamed of what he had done. But he did not like the way things had gone. It was not natural that a boy of spirit should allow himself to be robbed in this barefaced way, without even a word of protest—and the awkward suspicion would persist in forcing itself upon

him that perhaps, after all, the coins were bad. He pulled them out, and chinked them on a stone, he weighed them as Mother Seagull had done, and like her he bit them—but he wasn't sure.

Accordingly, it was with a quaking heart that he presented two of them at the bar of the "Old Oak" that evening, and it was not till they had been cheerily swept into the counter drawer by the delighted landlord that Jonas felt quite at ease.

It was long past gate-time, but Tom did not care. He was past all the petty worries of the Warming-Pan and the Carcer. What did a few cuts more or less, or an hour or two in a school-cell matter to one who might be at any moment thrown into a real prison for years and years?

His one thought was how to get rid of the rest of the bad money, for he knew that his locker would be searched the very first thing after he had been reported to the police—and that would be immediately.

The idea of running away altogether,

before it was too late, suddenly took hold of him, and he half involuntarily turned down a side path that led to the Wandrage Woods.

“Hillo, Hammond! where are you off to now?”

It was Mr. Dawkins who spoke. He was returning from a specimen-hunting expedition, and had been behind Tom for some little time. Tom had no reply ready, so he only looked gloomily round, and stood quite still.

“Where have you been?” continued the master.

“To the town, sir,” answered Tom truthfully but wearily. Dawkins looked at him keenly.

“Getting into trouble again, Hammond? What is the matter? Why have the other fellows cut you? You used to be rather a favourite with them all.”

Again Tom had no answer. His head hung low, and he slouched along wearily.

“See here, Hammond, take my vasculum for me, and this trowel, and nobody will ask

you questions when we come in together. Then you'll come to me during the recess to-morrow. I want to have a long talk with you."

That was why Tom did not get the Warming-Pan that night, and as he lay awake wondering how he could get rid of that load of dangerous money, he thought that if all masters were like Dawkins, school life might be tolerated.

Gradually he made up his mind to tell Dawkins all about it at recess—that is, if the policeman did not arrive before that. In this thought there was comfort, and with comfort came sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

BY and by Tom awoke with a start, and found himself standing on the floor. He was very sleepy, so, since nothing could surprise

him much now, his only desire was to get back to bed to continue his sleep. To his astonishment he could not find the bed, but bumped against something where the bed should have been. After one or two trials he became convinced that he had lost his way somehow; but after further investigation he discovered, to his great relief, that he was in his own room at home.

Every one of his wishes, up till now, had brought nothing but misery. Surely this time his wish to be at home would bring satisfaction. He tumbled cheerily into bed, and let his weariness have fair play. In a few moments he was as sound as a top.

When he awoke his first care was to rake out some of his old clothes from one of his drawers, but he could not lay his hands on any shoes or slippers. He thought it was very early, but when he got into the corridor, and saw the friendly face of the old clock that stood there, he was surprised to find that it was nearly ten o'clock.

"So much the better," thought Tom, "the governor's safely away at half-past nine, so I can go and see the mater."

When he had slid down the banisters in a way that he never dared to do when his father was at home, and had sprung upon the mat at the foot of the staircase, he was astonished to hear the sound of an angry voice coming from the dining room.

It was some moments before he could believe that it really was his father who was speaking. He had in his time heard his father say some very stern things, but never in tones like those that were coming from the dining room.

Tom's first thought was one of distinct satisfaction at not having been able to find his shoes; had he had on his ordinary shoes the noise they would have made in the hall would certainly have betrayed him. As soon as the boy had recovered his senses, he listened to find out what the trouble was. This is what he heard:

"Don't cry like a baby, Margaret," here

the father's voice lost some of its harshness, "he's no more mad than I am."

Then he went on, with a roar that was not the best proof of his own sanity:

"If I had that wooden-headed prig of a schoolmaster here I'd—"

Tom's ears tingled with pleasure at those welcome words; they just expressed his own ideas; but his mother cut short the father's wild abuse:

"But, John, it's not Dr. Ackwork that I rely on; it's that terrible Dr. Cerebrerr."

"Yes; but, my dear," replied Mr. Hammond soothingly, "when a madhouse doctor is called in he's like all the other specialists, he thinks it's sure to be madness, or they wouldn't have called him."

Here the mother burst out crying again, so Tom could not make out what she said, but it was something that made the father very angry, for his answer was roared out at his loudest:

"Just let them dare to say a word about Aunt Jane—Aunt Jane queer! Let them

ask her solicitor, and I'm thinking he'll advise them to look in softer quarters for a lunatic."

"And you know Grandpapa Fisher would persist in eating standing. They'll say he was mad too, and it runs in the blood; I know they will."

Here the father made some movement; so Tom, in mortal terror of being caught, flashed upstairs three steps at a bound.

Safe in his own room, he sat down moodily on his bed to think over matters. Then he slipped out and along the corridor to Ettie's room. The door was open, so he, being a boy, walked calmly in.

What was his astonishment to see Ettie kneeling at her bedside with her face buried among the bedclothes. She was sobbing bitterly.

This was too much for Tom. Was the whole world turned upside down? Was everybody either storming or crying?

He stepped up to his sister and laid his hand on her shoulder. She looked quickly

up, then with a terrified scream fell forward in a dead faint.

Tom's first care was to rush to the door and lock it. He reflected that if that scream brought up his father it would be highly desirable to have time to make some necessary preparations for the interview. The door once bolted, he did all that a clumsy boy could for his unconscious sister. The half-empty water-ewer stood within easy reach, and was soon emptied over the fainting girl.

Perhaps Tom was a little rough. At any-rate his treatment brought her round all right. As soon as her eyes opened she drew away from Tom with every appearance of terror. By and by she stretched out her hand to touch him.

"Is it really you, Tom?" she asked tremblingly.

"Of course it's me; who did you think I was?" asked Tom in an aggrieved tone.

"So you've run away from school? Poor Tom! and were they not good to you?"

This was said in a petting tone, as if Tom

had been a little child that had lost his way. He did not like it a bit. He thought she was chaffing him, as she often did. So he only grunted:

"If you'd been chivied about the way I've been, you'd have been glad to run away too. But, Ettie, what's the matter in the house? The pater's in a fearful wax, and it's something about Old Beetroot, for I heard him blowing him up, and here you are crying. What's the racket about?"

"It's about those fairies, you know," began Ettie, watching Tom intently as she spoke. Tom started and exclaimed:

"How did he know about it?"

"About what?"

"About Peas-blossom, and the Wishes, and the money, and—"

"Oh, Tom, Tom!" sobbed Ettie, "promise me never to say anything about her on any account to anybody at all—never, never, never! Promise me that, now; there's a dear good boy!"

"But why, Ettie? What's the harm?"

She can't hurt me worse than she's doing. All my wishes are making me as miserable as can be. Here I thought I'd be as happy as a cricket to be home again, and everybody is crying. But I don't care. I thought *you* would have been glad to see me; but it doesn't matter."

"Now, Tom, dear, you know I'm glad to see you; it isn't fair to go on like that."

"Well, if you're glad to see me why do you go on fainting and screeching when I—"

"I was just frightened, Tom; I didn't expect you, you know. Now promise me about Peas-blossom!"

"But why, Ettie?" persisted Tom.

"Oh, never mind the why, Tom. Just promise because you love me, Tom. You do love your sister, don't you, Tom?"

"Of course I do," replied Tom, wriggling out of his sister's arms before she would have time to kiss him, which he knew would be the next thing. "That's all right, and I'll promise right enough, only I don't see the sense of it."

"Oh, you *are* a good boy. Now, mind you, whatever anybody says to you, you know nothing whatever about Peas-blossom or any other fairy."

"But I do, you know, and when my other wishes are up I'll wish that Peas-blossom—"

"Oh, Tom, Tom!" sobbed Ettie, "how can you say such things? Won't you promise me to deny that you ever saw her? Do, Tom, do!"

"But you used to wig me about my crams, and it would be an awful cram to say I hadn't seen her in the Carcer."

It took the usually truthful Ettie a long time to persuade Tom to take her view of the matter; but she gained her point at last, not by argument, but by the influence of her genuine love for Tom, and his for her.

Then she dried her tears, and tripped downstairs to prepare the way for Tom's appearance. He was to wait upstairs till she came for him, but she had scarcely entered the dining-room when a terrible voice shouted from below the one word:

“Thomas!”

There was no refusing a call like that. Whenever Tom heard his official name he knew that instant obedience was the best, the only policy. In a twinkling he stood before his father in the hall, then silently followed him into the room.

The father's keen eyes rapidly took in Tom's expression of dazed inquiry, and his countenance fell. His voice, though severe, was very calm as he asked:

“Well, where have you come from, young man?”

“From school, sir.”

Here the father referred to a letter he held in his hand, and asked:

“When did you leave?”

“Twelve o'clock last night, at least that is the usual time—”

Tom had intended to explain how Peasblossom had a habit of working, but his promise suddenly came into his mind, so he stopped short.

“So that's the usual time, is it?” asked

the father sarcastically. "And how did you come, may I ask?"

"Oh, I don't know myself. I just—eh—" The promise again interfered with his explanation, so he finished lamely, "I just walked."

"Ah, you just walked fifty miles in ten hours—not bad walking; and you don't seem very tired either, and your clothes don't seem any the worse—"

"But, John," broke in the mother, anxious to save her boy as much as possible, "these are not his school clothes; they were in the top drawer."

"So you've had time to wash and change your clothes all within the ten hours. When did you arrive?"

"I didn't change at all, for I had only my night-shirt when I—"

"Better and better," replied the father, with returning cheerfulness. "Fifty miles in ten hours, and in your night-shirt. Did you ever hear of the marines?"

"I didn't take any time at all," began

Tom indignantly, when the father interrupted him in his driest tones:

“My boy, if I were you I wouldn’t say any more just at present. You’ve said quite enough to keep us going for a little while. Now let me tell you something. You ran away from school last night or early this morning. You got smuggled into the three o’clock goods train at Wandrage, and you waited about the avenue till you got in with the milk.”

“But—” began Tom.

“Listen to me, sir,” thundered his father. “What nonsense is this that you have been carrying on with at school, about fairies and rubbish?”

Again Tom was about to plunge into explanations, when he caught Ettie’s eye, and murmured in a dazed sort of way:

“Fairies, what fairies?”

A relieved look suddenly flashed across the father’s face. Then, anxiety giving place to anger, he burst out:

“So, you young scamp, you have been

befooling your teachers, and making learned men make asses of themselves. I'll teach you to play pranks of that kind. Come upstairs, sir!"

Half-an-hour afterwards a sore and subdued Tom came out of his father's room to prepare to catch the 12.30 train back to Wandrage.

It was only when Tom and his father were ready to set out for the train that Mrs. Hammond began to wonder what Tom had done with his school boots. They were nowhere to be found. Next the school clothes were missed. When Tom was questioned about how he was dressed when he came home he maintained a dogged silence, and the discovery of his school night-shirt in his room only increased the mystery. The 12.30 would not wait, so Tom and his father were packed off to the station, leaving the unsolved mystery behind them.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUSPICIONS.

IT had been eleven o'clock that morning before Mr. Hammond had thought of sending a telegram to Wandrage, telling the Doctor that Tom had turned up at home. The consequence was that the whole school had been turned upside down in the search after the missing boy. The Doctor had been grave enough about it, as soon as Tom was first reported as lost. But his gravity was deepened when he had examined the locker.

Naturally, everybody was relieved when the telegram came, but nobody rejoiced with anything like the joy of Bunker. He had long ago regretted the loss of his old ally's friendship, and would have willingly made the first step towards a reconciliation—only it was not considered good form for the boy who had sent Tom to Coventry to be the first to bring him back.

However, when Tom and his father drove

up to the school door, and Tom was left outside while Mr. Hammond was taken to the study, Bunker came forward, and stretching out his hand, said:

"I say, Tubs, I don't mind owning up that I was wrong about you all the time. Will you put it there, old man?"

Tom "put it there" right willingly, and the two boys strolled off, talking about things that boys do not usually talk of. Bunker was very anxious to hear all about Peasblossom—not that he believed in her, but because he was interested to know what a half-mad fellow's stories were like.

After Tom had given a full account of all that had happened to him he was surprised at Bunker's remark:

"I'm stewed if I believe you're the least bit touched. Own up now; you're doing it all to have a rise out of old Beetroot and the rest of them: isn't that about the size of it? Eh?"

They all but quarrelled again, but at length Tom brought Bunker to the very

peculiar point of view that he did not believe Tom was mad, and more than half believed he was speaking the truth.

This took a long time, however, and in the meantime a very trying conversation had been going on in the study. After shaking hands, Mr. Hammond began in his sharp business way:

“So, Doctor, our learned friend Cerebrerr has been making an ass of himself. He is forty, I believe, and is certainly not a physician. Can’t distinguish between a shamming school-boy and a lunatic.”

“Has he confessed, then?” asked the Doctor, with interest.

“Confessed what?” was Mr. Hammond’s curt reply.

“His deceitful conduct, and all that underlay it. We can’t make it out a bit.”

“As I understand it, Tom has been getting into some scrapes, and in order to screen himself has taken to some cock-and-bull stories, with the result that you and Doctor Cerebrerr have made up your minds that he

had lost his senses. Now the boy is as sane as you are, let Dr. Cerebrerr say what he will."

"Then the boy has said nothing?" queried the Doctor.

"What could he say, but deny all knowledge of the silly twaddle you wrote about the fairies."

"Mr. Hammond, it is a very painful business altogether, and I do not at all see my course clear before me. I fear it is a much more serious matter than you think."

"I tell you, Dr. Ackwork, that you may at once dismiss from your mind all idea of Tom's being off his head—he's simply lazy and mischievous. Cerebrerr's talk about over-pressure is so much— Pooh! Why discuss the thing seriously?"

"Till this morning, Mr. Hammond, I would have been prepared to dispute your position, but now I am sorry to say that I must agree in your belief that the boy has been hoodwinking us with his fancy tales."

"Sorry, sir! I thought you would have

been glad to find that one of your pupils had escaped so terrible a fate."

"True, Mr. Hammond, but there may be a worse fate than even that we feared for your boy."

"Why, what do you mean, Doctor?"

"It grieves me to the heart to have to tell such a thing to a father," replied the Doctor, slowly and solemnly, and evidently really unwilling to say what was in his mind.

"Out with it and have done with it," cried Mr. Hammond impatiently.

"Of course there may be some explanation, but I fear, I fear."

"Will you tell me what you are driving at?" snapped out the irritated father.

"The fact is, sir, that in searching through your son's locker this morning, to see if we could find any clue to his whereabouts, I came upon a bag of money."

Mr. Hammond sat down very suddenly, but in a twinkling was his old self again, and asked:

"What sort of bag? There's nothing wrong in having a bag of money in your locker, is there?"

"Not in itself, of course. But when a school-boy has a bag filled with all sorts of coins, from farthings to sovereigns, the whole amounting to over fifty pounds, it looks suspicious, sir, to say the least."

Mr. Hammond murmured something about "saving up", but there was no conviction in his tone. He gazed helplessly at the Doctor for a while, then asked what exactly was suspected.

"We know nothing at all as yet," replied the Doctor. "The bag was only discovered this morning, and no money has been lost in this neighbourhood, as far as we know."

"I'd rather have him crazy than this," muttered the father. Then turning to the master, he angrily asked: "What right have you to take away a boy's character in this way, without even giving him a chance to speak for himself?"

"You forget, Mr. Hammond, that I have

only said things look suspicious, and, further, that I have only said even that to you, his father. Nobody else knows anything of the affair, except so much as they can guess from the story of a boy called Snaffles, who, it appears, assisted in the spending of some of the money. When you returned with the boy I was quite prepared to hear that he had confessed to having brought the money from home without your knowledge. But, since that is not so, we must examine him to see how he accounts for the possession of so much money."

It took some little time to find Tom, who, as we know, was walking and talking with Bunker. In the meantime Mr. Hammond sat motionless, his head between his hands. By and by the Doctor returned, leading in Tom, who looked a good deal astonished at the sudden change in his father. The Doctor was the first to speak.

"Now, my boy, we know all about that money being in your locker; we needn't tell you what a serious matter this is: you know

that for yourself. Your only plan is to tell us the whole truth: nobody knows anything about it yet, except your father and me."

"But I didn't know it was bad, sir. I thought it was all right when I bought the pistols. I know it's dangerous to pass bad money."

This was worse and worse. The two men looked at each other without exchanging a word. Then the Doctor produced from his desk the rough bag, and the two began to chink the coins, to weigh them, and even to bite them just as the others had done.

"They seem all right," said the Doctor doubtfully.

"They *are* all right," replied Mr. Hammond confidently.

"I told them so," added Tom with a sigh of relief. He thought his troubles were at an end. His father didn't.

"Where did you get this bag?" asked the Doctor severely. Then all Tom's anxiety began over again: he naturally hesitated.

"You must answer at once," continued the

Doctor, "and remember, the truth is your only hope."

It was not so much the Doctor's stern voice as his father's broken-down look that made Tom realize the gravity of the situation. He felt that Ettie, if she had been there, would have told him to tell the truth: so he dropped into a complete account of the whole circumstance. At the first mention of Peas-blossom Mr. Hammond started up and interrupted, but the Doctor quieted him and got Tom to go on.

When the story was finished Tom was sent out of the room, and the Doctor turned to Mr. Hammond.

"Well, what is your opinion, now that you have heard this wonderfully well connected story? If the boy is lying he is lying better than any boy I have ever heard—and I must, in justice, say that your boy has always been truthful, however bad he has been in other respects."

"I don't know what to think of it," replied the father wearily. "It looks like

monomania—but monomania won't account for that bag."

"Has there ever been any other case in the family of this peculiar form of mental aberration?" asked the Doctor gently.

"Kleptomania you mean?" queried Mr. Hammond with a grim smile.

"No, no, any mental disorder, I mean."

"Oh there has been a story or two about queer things some of our folks used to do, but if we were to begin to tot up all the queer things people do, and set them down to insanity, there would be more people inside the asylums than out."

"Were they bad cases?" went on the Doctor, without paying much attention to Mr. Hammond's grumble.

"They weren't cases at all, I tell you," returned Mr. Hammond impatiently. "A few eccentricities of an old man and an old woman don't qualify for the mad-house."

"True," replied the Doctor. "It now remains to decide what course we ought to follow under these most exceptional circum-

stances. It does not seem to me necessary to call in the police just yet."

"Certainly not," was the eager reply. "What in the world could they do anyway?—except perhaps ruin the character of my boy, to say nothing of the school."

The Doctor paid no attention to this last shot, but contented himself with saying that it would be necessary to keep their ears open to learn if any money had been lost, either at Wandrage or at Denbridge. The bag itself gave no clue, for it was exactly like a thousand others that you see in the bank any day. Meanwhile all Tom's movements were to be carefully watched.

Mr. Hammond went away a very sad man, but he left Tom behind him a very happy boy. He was out of Coventry now, and never lacked a companion the whole of that day. How was he to know that certain of his school-fellows were actually told off to watch him. At anyrate, they had been asked by the Doctor to see that he was never left alone. To be sure they had been told that

Tom was not very well, and he might need their help at any moment, but boys are not so blind as all that, and they all knew that something very extraordinary had happened.

That night Tom did manage to keep awake till midnight, just in case anything might happen which might demand all his waking attention. As the hall clock in the far distance gave out its twelve sweet chimes, Tom rejoiced that he was left in peace for one other night, for nothing happened. At least not just at first: for that clock must have been wrong. A few minutes after the last stroke had died away, and Tom was almost over, he felt a slight tap as if something had fallen upon the bed. Feeling about very cautiously, in case he should make a noise and disturb the other fellows, he found his hand touching something very hard and cold. Taking it up, still very cautiously, he found it to be a big knife with a crooked blade, and a very rough handle. He had not long to think before he remembered that he had wished for a scalping knife, "a real scalping knife

that had been used by Red Indians". Now that he had it he was very anxious to be rid of it. There was one thing certain, it could not lie about the bed the way the roly-poly had done. The jam had only spoiled the bedclothes, the knife might spoil him. Besides, being a real knife from America it would be sure to be poisoned. Tom did not think how useless it would be to poison a knife used for finishing off dead people. But then Tom didn't know but that the Indians might use the scalping knife for other things, and in fact neither do I. The important thing is that he managed, with some difficulty, to get the deadly weapon stowed away in his locker, without rousing any of his friends.

All next day Tom was itching to examine his prize, but he could not get even one moment to himself. If he could have got Bunker alone he would have shared his secret with him. But even this small amount of solitude was denied him. It seemed as if the day would never come to an end. Tom

muddled his work in all his subjects, and under ordinary circumstances could not have escaped the warming-pan. But that day everybody seemed to make allowance for him, so that night found him still unharmed, though sadly disappointed at not being able to enjoy his real scalping knife.

That night, too, he managed to keep awake till twelve. But this time absolutely nothing happened. He kept awake a good while after the clock had struck, in the hope that Peas-blossom's time was a little slow. It was all in vain; nothing happened, except that Tom at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

EXIT ACKWORK.

NOTHING happened to Tom it is true. But Peas-blossom was not idle all the same. Something had happened elsewhere, something very serious indeed. Tom knew that the moment he got down from the dor-

mitory. Everybody looked scared and excited; everybody spoke in whispers.

Tom had a very good idea what had happened, though he had to keep up appearances by asking what it was. He pretended to be very much astonished at the answer, though it was exactly what he had expected:

"The Doctor has disappeared."

Tom's astonishment had been pretended, his horror was very real. He was the cause of all this worry: it was he who had driven the Doctor from his own school: he would be responsible for anything that happened now. He would have given almost anything to have had the Doctor back again, even if the first thing he should do on his return were to apply the warming-pan.

When he had wished this wish it had seemed to him such good fun, and he had made a fine picture to himself of all the hurrying and scurrying, all the weeping and wailing of the Doctor's friends, and the grinning and quiet chuckling among the "fellows".

His picture was not at all like the real-

ity. There was no hurrying and scurrying; no weeping and wailing (at least as far as Tom could see); and the "fellows", so far from grinning and chuckling, stood in little groups with scared faces discussing the situation.

It appeared that the disappearance was of the most mysterious kind. The Doctor had taken nothing whatever with him; no bag, no anything. Mrs. Ackwork was not a very discreet person: at anyrate, in her excitement she proclaimed all the circumstances of the case. Under any other conditions it would have sounded very funny, but at present it only increased the horror of the situation when the word was passed round that the Doctor had taken nothing with him but his night-shirt.

So it was evident that it was not a case of robbery. His watch lay on the dressing-table; his purse was in the pocket in which he usually carried it. The room showed no trace of being in any way disturbed.

Everybody's thoughts at once went to the

tinkers who had an encampment on the common, and against whom the Doctor was known to have an ill-will, on account of their interference with his poultry-yard and kitchen-garden. Tinkers do a great deal of mischief, and are held responsible for a great deal more.

The alarm had been given at six o'clock, and since then the poor masters had had an uncommonly hard time of it. Now, they made an attempt to start some, at least, of the classes, in order to keep the minds of the boys at peace. It was a miserable failure, and broke down altogether, when some one suggested that the boys should form search parties. They might find something before the police arrived from Dunchester.

Of course Tom joined one of the search parties, but it was in a very hopeless way that he poked about in all the most unlikely places. He knew that all their search parties were no good. Oh, if he could only unwish that wish!

When they got back to the school, they

found the police in possession, and heard that the Shanelagh Mere was to be dredged. This news had a gruesome effect on the boys. Tom only muttered to himself "Let them dredge."

What troubled him most was what he heard about Mrs. Ackwork. She was a poor nervous little woman at best, and now, in her distress, was just passing from one fit of hysterics into another. About the Doctor himself Tom did not feel so keenly. After all he was a man, and besides, the warming-pan cried out for vengeance, and Tom could have enjoyed telling Bunker all about it, and having a laugh together over it. But the sufferings of this poor lady, as reported to Tom, wrung his heart.

He wandered aimlessly through the meadows, wondering what he should do, and at last made up his mind to speak. He *must* speak. So he returned to school, and sent up one of the maids to say that he wished to speak to Mrs. Ackwork. The message came back that she could not be seen. Tom's next mes-

sage was that he had something to say about Dr. Ackwork. He was admitted at once.

The distracted lady was lying covered with a rug on a couch. She looked up eagerly when Tom entered, and anxiously asked:

"They say that you know something about the Doctor—what is it?"

"I don't know for certain," began Tom hesitatingly, "but I think the Doctor meant to make a long journey, and maybe he was afraid you mightn't like it. It's so far away, you know, and so—"

"What is the boy talking about?" wailed the lady, "What does *he* know about the Doctor's plans?"

"Well, I—you know—I—I—eh,—I dreamt all about it, and I'm quite sure that the Doctor's all safe and right, and will be back in a fortnight."

"Ah, you dreamt! you dreamt! Take him away, Mary, he's silly anyway, I should not have let him come, take him away!"

When poor Tom returned to the playground, quite unhappy at his failure to cheer

up the victim of his unhappy wish, he was met by startling news. The police had a clue. In dredging the Mere a mass of blood-stained rags had been discovered—evidently the remains of a night shirt. There were no initials on the cloth, but the laundry mark of the school was clearly impressed in marking ink. A portion of the blood-stained part was sent to Headquarters, to have it examined to see if the stains were made by human blood.

Inspector Blankitt was in high spirits over this find: and when it was announced that the tinkers had disappeared from the common, he rubbed his hands with delight.

“As plain’s a pike-staff,” said Inspector Blankitt.

But by and by it did not seem quite so plain. For the neck-band of the blood-stained shirt was found to be far too small for the massive neck of the missing Doctor. Further investigation left no doubt that the garment must have belonged to one of the boys at Willowbank.

"Hum!" said Inspector Blankitt.

After rubbing his chin a great deal the inspector had a talk with several of the maids, and then a very short interview with Mrs. Ackwork.

The result of all this talking was, as might have been expected, that Tom found himself once more in his old place before the Doctor's table. But this time there was no Doctor, and Inspector Blankitt was a poor substitute for the portly figure of the missing headmaster. The round bay in the table seemed a wooden satire on the leanness of this new occupant of the Doctor's chair.

"So, young 'un, you know more about this affair than you care to tell, eh?"

But the experience of the past few days had made Tom exceedingly cautious.

"Yes, I told Mrs. Ackwork about my dream."

"So you did, my lad, and dreams are good enough for women. But you're going to wake up now, and tell me the truth."

Tom didn't seem to have anything to say

to this. Like most boys, he had an enormous faith in the cleverness of the police, especially when there was an inspector about. The common constable, they know to be very foolish, and a miserable runner.

That's why Tom was sure it was no good trying to hide anything from this terrible inspector. It was all very good trying to keep his father, or even the Doctor, in the dark by telling half truths, but this stern fellow was different. So Tom held his tongue.

"Come, lad, speak up!" snapped Blankitt sternly. "Where is Dr. Ackwork?"

Tom continued his reflections. Why should he hide it after all? He hadn't broken the law. There was no law against wishing. And even if they put him in prison he had only to wait till his other wishes were all done, and then he would wish himself out again, the way he had done from the Carcer. Besides, it would comfort that poor little lady upstairs.

This time Blankitt came round the table and seized Tom's arm.

"Have you lost your tongue? Mind you, it's not a matter of flogging this. It's the prison and the gallows you've to deal with. What do you know about Dr. Ackwork?"

Still Tom hesitated. He did not like to answer so long as the inspector held his arm as if he were a thief.

"Let go my arm first."

The inspector was a sensible fellow. What he wanted was a certain piece of information. It did not matter to him whether he got it by crushing Tom's arm or by letting it go. He at once dropped the arm and asked again:

"Now, where is Dr. Ackwork?"

"In Jericho," replied Tom quietly.

The inspector looked stupid for a moment, then seizing Tom's arm more fiercely than ever with one hand, shook the other in his face and roared:

"You cheeky young cub! I'll teach you to sauce me. You come with me to the lock-up!"

"What's the racket now?" was Tom's ag-

grieved reply. "You worry me till I tell you where the Doctor is, and when I tell you you fly into a rage. It isn't fair. I'm sick of the whole thing."

Blankitt looked a little astonished at this remonstrance, and, evidently thinking there might be something behind it, calmed down a little, and asked as quietly as he could:

"How do you know he's in Jericho?"

"Because I wished him there."

"Indeed, how considerate of you! And does he always do what you wish him, the Doctor?"

By this time the inspector had had time to remember the stories he had heard from the maids about the peculiarities of Tom, and was ready to treat him in the proper way. It was not long till, in spite of his promise to Ettie, the name of Peas-blossom was again mentioned, and the whole story told as far as it concerned the Doctor's disappearance. When the story was done Blankitt had lost a great deal of his confidence in a speedy solution of the mystery.

Of course, he did not for a moment believe a word of what Tom had told him; but he could not be quite sure whether Tom himself did not believe his own story. Of one thing he was sure: this was that Tom formed the centre round which he must work to get at the truth of the affair.

Blankitt sent off two wires, one to Dr. Cerebrerrr, the other to Mr. Hammond, and then let Tom go off with his fellows. But there was no pleasure for Tom that day. He could hardly talk sense to his friends, so much was his mind taken up with the cares of his awkward position.

After the day was pretty well spent he was sent for again, and this time he knew by the serious faces of his father and the others that a crisis had come. He was not the least astonished to see his father. Nothing could astonish him now. It was Mr. Hammond that spoke first:

“Well, Tom, what in the world have you been after now? Do you know that they want to shut you up in an asylum?”

"Shut me up in an asylum? You don't mean a madhouse?"

"That's just what I do mean, or rather what they mean. They think you've had something to do with the disappearance of Dr. Ackwork."

"So I have, but that'll be all right as soon as——"

"So you have! What does that mean, my boy? And how can it be all right?"

"Well, you see, I wished him at Jericho, so he's there now. But as soon as ever my other wishes are done I'll wish him home again, and then it will be all right."

Mr. Hammond's face grew haggard at this matter-of-fact statement. He felt he could no longer hold up his head; Tom really was mad. But this was only the beginning of the trouble, for Blankitt suddenly produced the scalping-knife, and asked Tom how he had got it, and what the dark marks on it were.

Naturally Tom was abashed at this new discovery, and looked very guilty indeed.

When his usual Peas-blossom explanation was given it was received with a smile of incredulity on the part of the inspector, and with an "I thought so" air on the part of Dr. Cerebrerr.

It was in vain that Mr. Hammond protested that Tom was a mere boy, and that it was perfect nonsense to think of his committing such serious crimes as they suspected him of. The inspector was quite clear that the boy must be kept safe in case he should be wanted, while Dr. Cerebrerr pointed out the great advantage of having Tom under his roof, since there could be no taint of a criminal charge in such custody.

The one concession they made was that the confinement was to be as comfortable as possible.

As they drove along to the station Mr. Hammond was sorely distressed whether he ought to tell of the bag of money; but he concluded that a father was not called upon (since the Roman Period, at least), to act against his son.

When they got to Wanderpark Tom was taken up three long stairs and placed in a very comfortable bedroom, not unlike his own at home. As it was late by this time, he was told that supper would be brought up to him, and that he'd better then go to bed.

Meanwhile Mr. Hammond, Blankitt, and Dr. Cerebrerr had a violent discussion in the doctor's room. Mr. Hammond angrily maintained that the whole story of Tom's insanity was absurd. He was mischievous just because he was healthy, instead of being insane because he was mischievous.

Dr. Cerebrerr was calm and considerate, but very firm. Science, he said, could make no allowances, and science showed that Tom, &c., &c.

Blankitt sat grimly by and said nothing, but it was evident that he agreed with the doctor. Poor Mr. Hammond had to leave the asylum without making the least impression. Of one thing he was glad—he did not require to tell Mrs. Hammond for a day

or two yet. There was no definite charge against Tom, and his name would be kept out of the newspapers for the present.

CHAPTER X.

THE BARQUE "STELLA".

MR. HAMMOND had blamed business cares for his evident uneasiness that Friday night. This was very fortunate, for on Saturday morning at breakfast he was able to explain the telegram he received as a part of that business worry.

As a matter of fact, the telegram was from Dr. Cerebrerr, and ran simply:

"Your son has escaped during the night."

That was all, but the effect must have been terrible, for Mrs. Hammond nearly fainted at the sight of her husband's face.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, as soon as she had recovered her composure.

"Oh, it's more of that very disagreeable

business of last night, and it demands my immediate attention. I must rush at once."

As the cab rumbled along to the station Mr. Hammond stared at the flimsy pink sheet, but could get no further information from it. "*Your son has escaped during the night*"—that was all; not even a name.

Arrived at Wanderpark, he was shown into Dr. Cerebrerr's study. The Doctor had a very puzzled, not to say irritated, look.

"Never had a case like it," he began. "It is quite impossible for him to have got out without the connivance of three of my servants, and it is absurd to suppose that they've been bribed by a mere boy with probably not a copper in his pocket."

"Tom's a first-rate climber," replied his father, "and if—"

"Come up and see the room," said the doctor grimly.

The window was securely barred, and the bars were so close that no cat that had enjoyed what the advertisements call "a comfortable home" could have got through

between them. Mr. Hammond approached the fireplace.

"A grating of inch-thick iron let into the stone at the sides," was the doctor's reply to this unspoken question.

"And untouched?" queried Mr. Hammond.

"Everything is exactly as it was last night," replied the doctor, "except that your son was here then, and now he isn't. I'd give fifty pounds to know how he managed it."

This hint of a reward roused the father's fears.

"Remember, doctor, there's no definite charge against my boy; there's no warrant for his arrest; and I won't have any advertising about him. I won't have it. I'm going straight to my solicitor's now to see what is to be done."

"Certainly, Mr. Hammond. I should be very sorry to take any unwarrantable action; but are you not a little anxious about what has become of the boy yourself? Would advertising be such a bad thing after all?"

This last remark was made by the Doctor,

with just the least touch of suspicion in his tone.

"Of course, of course," returned Mr. Hammond hotly, "and I'll probably advertise myself if he does not turn up at once; but it's a very different thing advertising from Weldom Avenue and advertising from Wanderpark."

"Quite true, or from Cranham Street," replied the Doctor drily.

Now the Central Police Station at Dunchester is in Cranham Street. So, with this disagreeable name ringing in his ears, Mr. Hammond took a stiff good-bye with the doctor, and made for his solicitor's at full speed.

At the bottom of his heart Mr. Hammond was rather proud of the way Tom had pulled himself, so far, out of the ugly scrape he had got into. It was not every boy who could have done it—and the fools thought he was insane! Then the discomfiting thought naturally arose in his mind, "Where is the poor boy now?"

Now Mr. Hammond's sympathy was not misplaced, for at that moment Tom was in rather a tight place. He had gone to bed the night before, fully dressed, and with his hat strapped across his breast, by means of his handkerchief and his jacket button-holes. He was determined to keep awake to see what might happen, and this time he hoped that something would happen. However, in case he should fall asleep, he made sure of having all his clothes with him.

He did not sleep, however. The excitement of the day, and the hope of a speedy release, kept his brain active. Afterwards he was sorry he had not slept as usual, for the sensation at twelve o'clock was most uncomfortable. There was a swimming feeling in his head, his heart seemed to sink away down into his stomach. He gave a great gasp, and then started to rub his eyes, which were dazzled by the sudden glare of sunshine.

For a moment he could see nothing for the dazzling brightness. Gradually his sight

returned, and he found himself standing on the deck of a three-masted sailing ship. The sails were flapping idly against the masts and rigging, making the only noise that was to be heard, except the gentle lapping of the waves against the sides.

“Hullo! Who in thunder are you? And where did you come from?”

Tom turned round, and saw a savage looking little man standing there with a sextant in his hand. He had been “taking the sun”, but now stared at Tom in quite as great astonishment as Tom stared at him. He was evidently an officer, but instead of having the neat blue jacket, with brass buttons, and the dainty peaked cap with gold braid that Tom thought all officers wore, he was dressed in loose white ducks from top to toe, with an old white hat surrounded by a big dirty-white cloth, which hung down his back.

It took Tom some little time to observe all this, which seemed to irritate the sextant man.



"HULLO! WHO IN THUNDER ARE YOU?"

"Stop your gaping and answer my question," he began, in a harsh growl, then added, not quite so gruffly, "and if you don't want to drop with sunstroke, you'll put on that beaver of yours and stand under the awning."

Mechanically undoing the strapping of his hat Tom put it on and stepped into the shade, still without a word.

"Well, of all the cool cubs I ever clapped eyes on, I'm blessed if ever I came across your mate. You can't have stowed away the whole fourteen days since we left Dunedin. You don't look starved, and you do look clean. How did you get here, anyway? Out with it?"

"I came from Willowbank school," replied Tom. He thought that would sound better than Wanderpark Asylum.

"Oh, you did, did you? We're much obliged, I'm sure, for the honour of your visit; and would it be too much to ask you to step back to Willowbank—A stowaway, sir, I think."

The last remark was addressed to a man very like himself, who appeared at that moment from the stateroom beside which they were standing.

"Stowaway is he!" roared this person whom Tom was soon to know as Captain Thomas. "Where on earth did you come from?"

Tom answered this question as before.

"Where, in thunder, is Willowbank school?"

"At Wandrage, sir, in Braxhamshire."

"But Braxhamshire is in England! How in the name of Davy Jones did you get here? What port did you ship at? Dunedin?"

"No, sir."

"Where, then, you young cub? Speak up: don't have me drawing answers out of you like tooth-pulling."

"But I didn't come from any port," gasped Tom, horrified at the position in which he found himself, "I just came."

"So I see," replied the captain grimly "You just stepped aboard from Wandrage. And you won't say another word. Mr.

Smeaton," he said, turning to the man that Tom had seen first, "get the triangle fixed up and we'll see whether the rope's-end will not make this young gentleman speak."

As Tom did not see the wink with which this order was accompanied he expected a genuine old-fashioned flogging, such as he had read of in his favourite stories. He knew that the warming-pan was not in it in comparison with the terrible lashings on board ship, and he wished himself safe back in the mad-house again. For there was no escape. If he told them the truth he'd be lashed for making fun of them; for by this time he knew exceedingly well what effect the story of Peas-blossom had. If he said nothing he'd be lashed for stubbornness. He could not even think of a likely lie. He was as much puzzled to account for his appearance there as was Captain Thomas. All that he knew was that among his wishes had been one, "I wish I was on board ship in the Tropics."

He thought he'd try the effect of truth,

so while three or four men were getting ready some bits of wood and ropes, Tom told the captain his story, so far as his wishing was concerned. He said nothing of the later troubles at Wanderpark. The captain and the mate seemed to be in doubt whether to be angry or amused. All they did was to smile grimly and let the preparations for the flogging go on.

Stripped to his waist, Tom's body showed the marks of the scratchings he had got in the wood.

"Hullo!" cried the captain, "so this isn't your first taste of the lash."

Tom explained the marks as well as his excitement would allow him. Still his judges showed no pity. He was ruthlessly fastened to the triangle that the sailors had so smartly rigged up, his hands being bound together and fixed above his head. How he wished he had just one wish at that moment. Then he bent forward his head and waited for the first blow. His main wonder was whether he would be able to hold out without yelling.

While the muscles of Tom's back were twitching in dreadful expectation, the captain broke in gruffly:

"Now, younker, before I give the order to lay on, you have a last chance to tell the truth and save your hide."

"I've told the truth already, and you won't believe me, captain."

"What? that about the fairy? You stick to that? All right. Now, bo'sun."

There was a moment's pause, a moment of awful suspense for poor Tom; then came the command:

"Unlash him, bo'sun. The cub has grit in him. It's a pity he has such a lying tongue in his head. But we'll send him down to the black hole, and feed him on hard tack, and see how long he'll stick to his fairy nonsense there."

Tom was at once unbound, and as soon as he had got on his jacket again he was led below.

"See that he gets lots of weevils in't," was the last thing he heard from the captain.

Shut up in a dingy little bunk, more like a press than a cabin, and having only a tiny port-hole for light and air, poor Tom lay and perspired, and thought how well off he'd have been in the mad-house. Some lukewarm water, and a biscuit as hard as wood lay beside him, but he was not the least hungry. What he wanted was air.

By and by he fell into a sound sleep. The poor fellow was utterly worn out, between the excitement of the preceding day and the excitement and heat of this. You must remember that he had slept none that night, for he had come from midnight straight into midday.

He was aroused by a knocking at the door. When he asked who was there a boyish voice answered:

"It's me, Jim, the boy, you know. You're a plucky one, you are! Never a tear or a squeak when they lashed you up. So I want to give you something better than the biscuit you've got. I've kinched a chunk o' good pork for you, and some lime juice. It's

in an old varnish bottle—but I washed it twice in hot water, so it's all right."

"You're a brick, Jim; but why don't you bring them in?"

There was a chuckling laugh outside.

"D'ye think they'd give me the keys, sonny? That's a good un!"

"But what's the good of your things if I can't get them. It's the lime-juice I want most. I can't drink this stuff."

"All right, sonny. I'm going up on deck just now. I'll tie a string round the neck o' this bottle, and hand it over the bulwarks just at your port. I'll swing it back an' fore for a bit till it just comes to your hand. The same wi' the pork. But we must be awful quiet about it, for if I'm caught—*Jeé—roo—salem.*"

Thus it came about that Tom had not such a very bad night of it as Captain Thomas meant him to have.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FATAL WISH.

THOUGH, thanks to Jim, the night was not so bad for Tom as Captain Thomas had intended it to be, it was bad enough. The heat was terrible, and after a long sleep Tom was very wide awake. He was soon thirsty too, for the varnish bottle was not very large, and was quickly emptied. It was now pitch dark, for there was no moon; so Tom could only feel, not see, the cockroaches that kept running over him as he lay in his evil-smelling bunk.

He remembered to have read somewhere that they were very fond of biting under the toe-nails and under the finger-nails. Tom's boots were stout, but his finger-nails were unprotected, so he thrust his hands into his pockets, in case the insects should get at them while he slept. But there was small chance of his sleeping. He could hardly breathe, and the tarry smell that

kept rising around him was gradually making him sick, when suddenly the vessel began to roll a little with a passing wind.

Tom held out for a long time. He thought if he could just manage to drag along till midnight, he might find himself whisked away to some other part of the world—only he hoped it would not be among the Red Indians, for he remembered with horror that one of his wishes had been to be in the Far West with the Redskins. But hour after hour passed. There could be no longer any doubt that it was far past midnight. Hope was quite gone, and Tom was very, very sea-sick.

He lay and kicked and groaned, and did all the other things that very sick persons do—sea-sick persons, I mean. Then he did a thing that many a sick person has done before him—a very foolish thing for anybody to do, but not at all dangerous: at least to anybody but Tom. For him it was very dangerous: for what Tom did was to wish he was dead.

“Oh—Oh-h-h! Oh—Oh-h-h! I wish I was dead!” said Tom.

At that very moment Peas-blossom flashed through the port-hole, and danced in a ring of bright light at the foot of Tom's bunk. All the cockroaches made off, thinking she was a lamp, and cockroaches hate lamps; all the moths, however, and the place was filled with them, kept flying around her till she waved her wand angrily; then they all disappeared.

Tom was like neither the cockroaches nor the moths. He neither ran from her nor to her. He just lay and groaned. Peas-blossom danced about awhile to see if he would not speak to her, for, you remember, the better class of fairies never speak till they are spoken to.

But Tom paid no attention to her; he kept on groaning. So poor Peas-blossom had to speak first, however well-bred she was. At first she spoke so quick that Tom could not have heard her even if he had been listening, which he was not. So she

got a great deal quieter, came close up to Tom's ear, and whispered:

"Now you've done it!"

"Done what? Oh-h-h! Oh-h-h!" groaned Tom.

"You've wished you were dead, and you'll die. He, he, he!" laughed Peas-blossom, "I said I would laugh, you know. He, he, he!"

"Very—Oh-h!—well—Ah-h-h!—Ah-h-h! I don't care—Oh-h-h!—Ah-h-h! I—Ah-h-h!—wantto—Oh-h-h!—die—Ah-h-h!" groaned Tom.

"I'll come back to-morrow, when you're better, and then you'll sing a different song," screamed Peas-blossom in a very bad temper, for she thought Tom would cry for mercy, and she wouldn't give him any pity, and would enjoy it very much. But Tom was not like any bad boy she had ever seen, and she had seen an enormous number.

"Um-m-mmm!—Um-m-m-mmm!" groaned Tom, and Peas-blossom went away, and the cockroaches came back, and Tom did not

care. Cockroaches like to be in the same bunk with a sea-sick person.

The wind having gone away during the night, Tom's sickness had gone with it. In its place had come a great hunger, so Peas-blossom need not have been so much astonished next morning at finding him gnawing away at the hard biscuit that had been left from yesterday.

"I thought you wanted to die," sneered Peas-blossom.

"Not just yet," replied Tom, going on with his biscuit.

"But you will, you know; there are just forty-seven wishes—that's forty-seven days—and then comes the day you wished to be dead, and dead you will be. I was sure you would make a mess of it sooner or later."

Tom laid down his biscuit. He had almost forgotten about this unfortunate wish: but now he found himself in a really awkward box.

"Do you still want to die?" asked Peas-blossom, chaffing him.

“Well, I don’t mind,” replied Tom, looking around at the filthy den in which he was shut up, and sniffing at the tainted air, “there isn’t much fun living here.”

Peas-blossom only laughed, so Tom went on:

“Can’t I give up my wish?” This was asked a little humbly, but Peas-blossom only laughed, so Tom had to put the best face on it, and said, as bravely as he could, though his heart was sinking, sinking within:

“I suppose I must just die then.”

Peas-blossom had just started to whistle out her anger, when the door opened, and the captain came in, or rather popped his head in. But the fairy was gone before the captain’s red face appeared.

“Well, younker,” he began, then he drew back with an exclamation, “What a fearful mess you have made of the place!—how it stinks!—Phew!”

He drew back for a minute, then popped his head in again to tell Tom to come on deck. Scarcely able to crawl, Tom struggled

up the companion-way, and staggered to a coil of rope, on which he sat down.

"Seen any more fairies?" asked the captain grimly, and Tom had sense enough not to reply.

"Come now, I'll tell you just how you managed," went on Captain Thomas. "You got in at Dunedin, with a lot of prog that you'd bought with your pocket-money—you've all the look of having too much of it—and stowed your stuff under the ballast tank—and now your grub's done you sneak out for dinner—hey?"

Tom didn't deny this charge, and as he looked sufficiently crest-fallen, the captain got into good-humour at having guessed so cleverly, and gave orders that Tom was to have some hot coffee and soft tack.

His good-humour did not last long, however, for the want of wind was very aggravating, and as he could not get at the one who was to blame for the weather, he vented his ill-nature on Tom.

"A nice guy you look in those togs; we

must make you a little more like the work you are going to do. Hi! Jim! Ain't you got any cast-offs that would fit a young gentleman in distress?"

Friendly as Jim had shown himself to be he could not help entering into the fun of the thing—it is not easy missing the point of the joke when one's captain makes it. A tatterdemalion suit soon made its appearance, a suit that any respectable scarecrow would have turned up its nose at, a suit that the captain jocularly remarked fitted Tom too much, for Jim was quite two years older than Tom.

At first the captain found some difficulty in getting anything for Tom to do, then he set him to the not very necessary work of pumping out the bilge water that the little windmills usually looked after, so long as there was any wind at all. As Tom pumped away wearily, and listened to the sleepy swish of the water as it poured down the sides of the ship, he longed for a change—anything would do, he thought, except the Red Indians.

By and by when he and Jim were allowed to sit down for a little, under the shade of a very rude awning made out of an old scrap of sail-cloth, Tom found that he was on board the barque *Stella*, of Liverpool, at present carrying a load of worthless water from Dunedin to Hull—not that water is scarce at Hull, but water is now the most convenient form of ballast. I could go on to tell what sort of other rubbish this gallant barque was burdened with; but you are not yet interested in shipping or the freight question, and I hope never will be, but this deplorable state of freights probably had a good deal to do with Tom's unhappiness at this time. For if he had been carrying a cargo, instead of this ballast rubbish, Captain Thomas would likely have been in a better temper, and would not have given the roar he did when he saw the two boys talking in this friendly way.

“Stirring times at sea,” thought Tom bitterly, as he remembered what he used to read in his penny romances; and he grinned

bitterly as he stirred the pot the cook had left in his charge. Then came washing of dishes and all the most uninteresting things possible, all the things that women do at home.

Night brought him a blessed relief. He knew that nothing could have happened during that day, for he remembered now that it was Sunday. Nothing in the ship would have suggested it to him. How was he to know that the fact that the men were washing their clothes (or making him do it for them) was a sure sign that it was Sunday? He had hopes that this night might bring him relief. But the hours passed in their old, weary way, and still Tom remained on board the *Stella*.

Next morning he was knocked up very early to help the cook. Then the carpenter asked the cook for "a loan of that kid". "That kid" was next passed on to the fore-castle, where some of the men were requiring his help to hold certain pieces of twine, while they manufactured puzzles to pass the time.

After a while Captain Thomas remembered his stowaway, sent for him, scolded him for a good-for-nothing, lazy, skulking rascal, then ordered him to swab the decks. Poor Tom seized the mop, and started vigorously, tired as he was. But it was almost noon: the sun was all but overhead; the heat was excessive; the perspiration streamed down Tom's face. He bitterly thought of the long wait before any help could come, even if midnight did bring relief—of which he was now none too sure, for each wish seemed to land him in a worse plight than the last.

So he kept swabbing away, swabbing away, trying not to think of his dirty, shabby clothes, and his weary arms. By and by he gradually ceased to think altogether, but just kept on working, hardly knowing what he was doing, and not caring very much.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE STOWAWAY.

IN the midst of his dreary work Tom was suddenly interrupted by a tremendous hammering in the forecastle. He stopped to listen. There seemed to be half-a-dozen hammers going at once in the most irregular way; and there was evidently something very seriously wrong, for Tom heard quite a chorus of very strong language coming up from below.

When this hubbub had continued for a couple of minutes Captain Thomas rushed forward to the forecastle hatchway, down which he shouted a savage demand to know what was the matter. For answer the men of the off watch came tumbling up on deck looking a little scared, and, when they caught the captain's eye, a little sheepish. There was a round dozen of them, but none had the courage to speak up. Each looked at his neighbour or at the deck, while all

listened to the furious hammering that had never ceased, but was now varied by an occasional bump of a heavier kind, followed by a more vigorous hammering.

Mr. Smeaton here appeared with a revolver in each hand. As soon as he had heard the noise he had dived into his cabin for weapons, in case it might turn out to be a serious row or a mutiny. Mr. Smeaton was evidently of a romantic turn of mind, a turn that the captain did not share. For when the mate offered his superior one of the revolvers the latter motioned it away with his hand, while he addressed one of the men:

"You, Thornton, you're old enough to have more sense. What does all this racket mean? Speak up, man."

Thornton raised his hand to touch his cap; but as he, like the others, had tumbled up bareheaded, it was not there. This seemed to surprise him so much, that he kept feeling about among his bristly hair without saying a word.

"Have you lost your tongue, you grinning

idiot?" roared the captain. But as no answer came from any of the men, and the hammering still continued, he plunged down the hatchway, determined to find out for himself what it all meant.

In three minutes he was on deck again, his face fiery, his eyes ablaze.

"Who brought that brute aboard?" he roared, glaring round the crowd of dazed sailors.

No answer was given. Instead, Mr. Smeaton, who had stood all this while a little bit off, with his deadly weapons ready for any emergency, asked:

"What brute, sir?"

The captain paid no attention to this aggravating question, but, seizing Thornton by the arm, almost screamed:

"Where did the brute come from? Tell me, I say, or I'll throttle you where you stand."

Driven at last to speech, Thornton replied in a dreamy sort of way, his hand still among his hair.

"Eh—well, sir,—eh—we don't know. He was just there, like, kicking like old Harry, when we heard him and bolted up here."

Again the captain angrily demanded who had brought the brute on board, and again got no reply.

"He didn't come on board himself, you know," he roared, then added in a somewhat calmer tone, "I've heard of stowaway men and boys, and even of a stowaway girl, but never of a stowaway pony."

The word "stowaway" seemed to give him a sudden light; turning to Mr. Smeaton he growled:

"Where's that stowaway cub? He's got something to do with this, I'll be sworn. Bring him forward."

Tom was quickly dragged by willing hands before the captain. Everybody felt relieved. Here at last was the culprit, or at anyrate somebody to blame for this awful appearance of a pony on shipboard.

"So, you young scoundrel, you're not

content with running away yourself, you must bring your pony with you."

For a moment the captain was almost good-humoured. It was such a relief to have got to the bottom of the affair at last. But his face clouded when Tom doggedly replied:

"I didn't bring the pony with me."

"You don't deny, then, that it is your pony?" went on the captain, repressing his anger.

"I suppose it is," answered Tom as before.

"And you want us to believe that it followed you, like a cat, because it loved you, eh? Swam all the way from Dunedin, eh? Just came up with the *Stella* a few minutes ago?"

The captain had almost recovered his good-humour. He thought he had quite cornered Tom. All he wanted to know now was how in the world the boy had managed the wonderful feat of stowawayng a live pony.

"You had an accomplice among the men, of course," growled the captain, turning wrathfully towards the group of amazed

sailors. "I might have known that from the first."

"No, sir."

"Then how did you manage to smuggle the beast on board, and feed it until now?"

"I've never seen the pony." Tom's teeth were clenched; he was determined to have it out with the captain.

"Oh, ho! So you're going to deny it after all. Now, look here, is this your pony or is it not?"

As the captain spoke, the kicking, which had died off a little, began again with fresh violence. Tom kept his eyes fixed on the deck as he replied:

"I think it is mine, sir."

"But you've never seen it. Now, young man, next time you lay yourself out for a lie, try to do it better, d'ye hear? Now, who helped you to get it aboard? Speak up, for I will know; you can't save him."

"Nobody helped me, and I never saw the pony. It was Peas-blossom—I wished for a pony, and I sup—"

Here the captain brought his big open hand slap on Tom's cheek, sending him spinning against the hatchway. But the blow was too late. The captain was very anxious that the sailors should not connect Tom's fairy tales with this wonderful appearance of a pony; for sailors only need a beginning to make up such a story about a ship as shall frighten the superstitious soul out of every man-Jack aboard her.

And now this mysterious black pony had been mixed up in the men's minds with Tom's fairy. Their own superstitious fears would do the rest.

"Off to your bunks!" growled the captain to the men; "and you, my lad, come with me, and see if I can't knock some of this nonsense out of your head."

As the captain led off Tom by the collar of his jacket, none of the men seemed inclined to obey the order to go below. Each looked at the other, till finally Thornton, touching his forelock, asked the retreating captain:

"Beggin' pardin for askin', but what have we to do with the—with—with—IT?"

It was obvious that superstition was already at work. It was all very good to call it a pony, but the men were evidently none so sure about that. To bring matters to a practical issue, and prove the pony to be a mere creature of flesh and blood, the captain growled:

"Cut the brute's throat, and hand over the carcass to the cook. Fresh pony should be better than pickled pig, any day."

So saying he dragged Tom off to the chart-room, where he tried hard to get at the truth of the matter. Naturally Tom stuck to his story in spite of the captain's anger. The latter was in the midst of a wild tirade when a knock at the door interrupted him. It was a youngish sailor, who began very nervously:

"Axin' yer pardin, we wanted Thornton to go on 'cause he began it, sir, but he wouldn't; so we cut sticks, an' I got the little one, so I had to come."

Here he paused for breath, which he sadly needed. The captain was now quite calm. His only word was a cold:

“Well?”

“They want me to say that they’re not agin the articles, an’ they means no offence, but they’re not goin’ below wi’ THAT.”

“Tell Mr. Smeaton I want to see him,” was all the captain said.

When the mate appeared, the captain’s orders were curt and pointed:

“Mr. Smeaton, you seem fond of shooting; go below, and put an end to that beast.”

Nothing more was said in the chart-room. By and by a shot was heard, then another, and another. The captain bit his moustache savagely, but this did not prevent two fresh shots from following the others.

“The fellow’s turning the place into a shooting saloon,” he grunted.

Soon Smeaton appeared with a very anxious face. It turned out that the men refused to touch the carcass. They were firmly convinced that it was no mere pony,

this mysterious apparition. It doesn't take five shots to kill a mere pony, they reasoned—

“Making no allowance for your bad aim,” snarled Captain Thomas.

Smeaton winced, but simply repeated that the men flatly refused to go near the dead animal.

The captain made no reply, but motioning Smeaton to follow him, went forward. His face was white, his teeth set. Tom did not at all like his look. Neither did the men when he appeared among them and repeated the order that they had refused to obey when given by Smeaton.

There was a moment's hesitation; but the captain's face and manner had more power in them than had Smeaton's revolvers. It was the young spokesman that made the first movement towards the hatchway.

The animal was brought up in five parts. The captain did not risk his authority by ordering the men to eat the flesh; he contented himself with having the parts thrown

overboard, making every man take a share in the work.

Retiring to the chart-room he told Tom gravely enough the result of the pony's appearance, and without adding any more in the way of reproach, sent him forward.

When Tom got below he found the men busy swishing out the blood-stained planks. At first they seemed to take no notice of him. By and by some water was splashed over him, apparently quite by accident. In a minute or two a bucketful of water met him full in the face. Though nothing whatever was said, there could be no mistaking the meaning of this, so Tom hardly needed the second bucket which soon splashed over him to warn him that he had better seek other quarters. The men wanted to be rid of such an uncanny companion.

Someone must have told the captain, or maybe he just guessed what had happened from the boy's drenched look. At any rate, as soon as he saw the poor dripping boy wandering about the deck he took him into

the chart-room, got Jim to bring the school clothes that had been taken away on the previous day, and told Tom to change his wet clothes for the dry ones. The captain next pointed to an old pilot-jacket hanging behind the door, and told Tom to use it for a blanket, and go to sleep under the chart-table.

Next morning the captain talked very seriously with Tom, telling him that the men all thought him a very dangerous passenger, and that very little would make them treat him very badly. All the same Tom must appear on deck as usual and in his dirty clothes. If he didn't it would only arouse their suspicion the more.

The captain was very angry at Tom for all the trouble he was causing, but, when every man's hand was against the boy, the rough captain felt that he must befriend the friendless lad, at least till they reached port.

Meanwhile Tom must go on with his work as if nothing had happened. So out he went,

and mid-day as before found him on deck wearily, wearily swabbing away, swabbing away, thinking of nothing, but swabbing away.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNCLE GUY'S.

SUDDENLY, in the middle of his dreary work, Tom received a queer shock, which made him clutch at his mop. He had a strange sensation of falling ever so far; then it became quite dark. Tom knew that he was somewhere else than in the ship, for the rolling had entirely ceased—but where he was he had not the least idea. He had wished to be in so many places that this might be almost anywhere. He knew that it was not among the Red Indians, and that was all.

His only reason for thinking that he was not in North America was that he had that peculiar feeling that we all have when we are indoors, even though we cannot see where we

are. There was no satisfaction in that, however, in itself. He might be in a very dangerous place and yet indoors.

By and by he began to move stealthily about, finding his mop of the greatest service in feeling his way. He had no difficulty in making out a wall on two sides of him, but the third seemed very peculiar. His mop seemed to be able to advance further on that side than he himself could, and it was only after much probing that he discovered that there was a staircase there.

Feeling now a good deal surer of his ground, he was perhaps not so careful as he had been at first. At anyrate, the mop caught in something, and in trying to disengage it Tom brought that something down with a mighty crash.

Whatever it was it seemed to have broken into a thousand pieces, for bits of it kept tumbling down the stairs and rolling all over the place.

In a moment all was silent again, only it seemed ever so much more silent than before.

Tom felt horrified at what he had done, and now hardly dared to breathe. After a few moments there began a frightful ringing of bells, some just above Tom's head, and some evidently down below somewhere.

He wanted very much to run away, but had no idea which way to turn. He could do nothing but wait. By and by a glimmer of light appeared on his right. It seemed to be coming from below, and soon was bright enough to show that it came from a doorway. Next appeared a head and a candle on the level of the floor, the candle being a little above the level of the head. As Tom kept perfectly quiet the head came up higher, and was followed by a livery-jacket with silver buttons.

Though Tom saw the head, the head could not see Tom, for Tom was in the dark; so Buttons came slowly up the stair, slowly, very slowly, and was just going to step out of the doorway, when a voice behind him whispered: "Ask who's there."

"Who's there?" asked Buttons, boldly

enough, for by this time he was quite sure there was nobody.

Tom thought there could be no great harm in replying, so he said quite quietly:

“It's only me—Tom Hammond.”

This seemed a very innocent answer, however ungrammatical Dr. Ackwork would have regarded it. But its effect was wonderful. Buttons disappeared like a flash, and with him, of course, the light. Left in the darkness Tom heard a great clatter of voices in the lower parts, evidently just at the foot of that mysterious stair.

Meanwhile a dim light appeared away up in the upper staircase, and the bells began ringing again like mad.

Soon from Button's door appeared a light again, but this time Buttons, or whoever carried the light, had the advantage, for it was a dark lantern, which completely lit up Tom while leaving the lantern-bearer in total darkness. All that poor Tom could see was a brawny arm, held in front of the lantern, bearing a stout poker.

There was evidently quite a crowd of people, to judge from their footsteps and their heavy breathing. But Tom was not left long to examine his enemies. While he was busily watching the poker the others had gradually approached, and before Tom quite knew where he was he found himself lying on the floor, with a whole clothes-line wound round and round his body, so as to pin his arms to his sides and render all motion impossible.

As soon as Tom was safely bound the place was lit up by half a dozen candles, and the surroundings became quite plain. They were in what was called the "back hall" of a great house; the staircase was the servants' entry to the upper storeys, and Tom's captors were the servants. Tom counted three men besides the boy Buttons. He didn't count the women. He hadn't time. Besides, he didn't want to. He knew that his business was with the men.

"Hemma, you run hupstairs an' tell 'er Ladyship we've captured 'im, so she can be quite heasy about 'im."

The speaker was a dignified portly man—that is, he was certainly portly, and would have been dignified, but that the effect was spoiled by the *déshabille* of his dress. It could be easily described—there was so little of it. But surely the reader's imagination can do a small job like that for itself.

“Now, young un,” said this person, who was evidently in command, “w’ere are the hothers? an’ as quick’s you like, fur we want to catch th’ ’ole gang.”

The Person was evidently of a very hopeful turn of mind, since he expected the whole gang to be waiting for him all the time since the first alarm. But it sounded well to talk that way.

“There’s nobody with me,” replied Tom; “I’m just myself. What place is this? I don’t know where I am.”

“Sweet babe,” replied a tall young fellow, dressed in a fine chocolate overcoat, and—well, and nothing else worth mentioning, “yer present haddress his Portman Square, but if ye’r thinkin’ o’ gettin’ yer visitin’ cards re-

printed yer can say Newgate, fur that'll be yer haddress to-morrer."

A grin from the other two men and a giggle from the maids in the background rewarded Chocolate's sally. But the Person had more serious business on hand.

"Peter, you go an' see that all the windows are fastened on the Mews. We must find out 'ow they got in."

While Buttons went off to do this message one of the maids suggested that the thieves had probably sent the boy down the chimney to open the door to them.

"Did yer come down the chimbley?" demanded the Person sternly.

"No, I came—eh—I don't know exactly how I came—"

"I dessay no," interrupted Chocolate.

"—— But if this is Portman Square I expect I am at my uncle's—"

"Not yet, my child," again interrupted Chocolate. "It's after y've collared the silver plate that ye go ter yer Uncle's. This ain't no pop-shop, this ain't."

"If this is Sir Guy Hammond's house, I'm his nephew."

"It's Sir Guy's right enough," replied the Person, "as ye knew very well before ye came 'ere, but as for—"

"Tell my uncle at once that I want to see him," cried Tom, delighted to find that he had wished himself into such a desirable place; but the only reply to his order was a counter order from the Person to carry him into the kitchen.

There he was placed on a table for the maids to gaze at. It was exasperating for Tom to sit and listen to the remarks they had to make on his personal appearance. They all agreed that he had a very ferocious look, that he was a born criminal, that you could read murder in his eyes, that it was a pity one so young should be so deeply steeped in crime, that after his seven years' penal servitude he would still be quite a young man, ready to resume his career of blood—and much more of the same kind.

They tried coaxing as the men had tried

bullying, to make him disclose the accomplices that they were sure he had. Of course he was obstinate, and would tell them nothing.

Next arose a big discussion about what was to be done with him. Since all the windows had been found to be properly fastened (to the great relief of the girl who was responsible for that job) nobody could make out how Tom had got there, or how his companions had got away. So it naturally followed that such a clever young burglar required more than ordinary watching. He must not be let out of sight even for a moment. If he could get in nobody knew how, it was only to be expected that he would get out the same way, were he given the smallest chance. They all agreed that it would be best to wait up watching their precious captive till master returned from an interview at Downing Street.

When the wearied Sir Guy returned from his official duties in the early morning he was astonished to find the whole house astir.

"What's the matter, Spifkins?" he asked a little irritably.

"There's been a disgraceful hattempt to rob the 'ouse by burglary," replied the butler with an air of great importance, "but we've captured 'im red-'anded."

"Where is he?" asked Sir Guy with an amused smile.

"'E's in the kitchen, but I'll send 'im hup—to the libray, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes, Spifkins, I'll see him there."

When Spifkins, a few minutes later, produced his well-bound burglar, his pride received a shock at his master's question.

"Is this all?"

"Yes, sir; we captured 'im in the back 'all."

Turning to Tom Sir Guy said, not unkindly:

"You've begun this sort of thing early, my boy."

"Don't you know me, Uncle Guy?" cried poor Tom, with tears in his voice, if not in his eyes.

"Good gracious! No, you little black-

guard!" cried the startled M.P., gazing at the dirty little ill-dressed sailor boy. "How dare you address me like that?"

"But you asked me up to London to spend Christmas, you know, and I thought you'd be glad to see me now, though I haven't my own clothes."

"Who in the world are you? You don't look like an apprentice burglar either."

"I'm Tom Hammond, sir. You remember you asked me up at Christmas."

"Yes, but this isn't Christmas, you know," replied Sir Guy, keenly regarding the boy. "And how's Isabel?"

"Isabel, sir?" queried Tom with a puzzled air. "Who is she?"

"Come, now, don't you know your own sister?"

"You mean Ettie, sir. She's quite well, thank you. I saw her just—" But here Tom remembered that perhaps the less he said about the last time he saw her the better it would be for him. Accordingly he broke off abruptly.

"Hum—mm," muttered Sir Guy to himself. "He knows the family all right, and I think he's like the little fellow I saw three years ago—I'll try him about his school."

"Which school are you at just now?"

"Willowbank, sir."

"And this is how the boys at Willowbank are got up, hey?"

"No, sir, but I didn't come straight from school. I was in the barque *Stella* of Liverpool."

Sir Guy received this information with a whistle, and a knowing look came into his eyes.

"Ah, that explains matters—run away from school, hey? But it's strange that I haven't heard of your bolt. Have you been long away, eh?"

"Only since Saturday, sir."

"Just so. A couple of days is quite enough to take all the romance out of it. Hey? Bolted at first port, and as London was nearer than Denbridge you thought you'd look me up. Really you do me credit

with those rags. Where in the world did you get them?"

Here Spifkins, who had restrained himself up till now with great difficulty, struck in:

"The young vagabone is imposin' on you, sir. 'Ow could 'e get in 'ere anyways? that's wot I'd like to know."

"Nothing easier," replied the master. "He knew you'd never admit him if he had appeared at the front door in this uniform of his, so he sneaked about till he got a chance of slipping in, and then trusted to get at me and tell me his story. Hey, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom feebly. He did not like this lying, but what could he do? If he had spoken of Peas-blossom the chances were that they'd send him off again to another mad-house.

"I say, Spifkins, unloose the little chap, poor little beggar, and send up some—what shall it be—coffee? Eh, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom as before.

Spifkins went off in no very pleasant

frame of mind. He was angry at having made such a blunder—if it was a blunder, as he kept muttering to himself. Up till now he had hated Tom only as a common thief, now he hated him as one who had got him, the great Spifkins, into a scrape.

Words can convey no idea of the amazement that seized the assembled servants when Spifkins returned to report the result of the examination before Sir Guy. Their first feeling was one of horror at having bullied and bound their master's nephew; but the prevailing feeling was one of pity for the "poor little fellow". The maids forgot all they had said about his criminal features, and remarked that the men ought to have known at once by his accent that he was not a "common" boy.

Spifkins maintained a judicious but damaging silence. Soon it became evident that the affair was not so plain as it had appeared. The master did not know everything; Spifkins could see as far through a millstone as anyone—and, generally, it was

regarded as a wise thing to keep both sides of the question well in view so as to be ready for any decision that time might demand.

The coffee was, under these circumstances, a little long in coming, which gave Tom time to tell his uncle as much of that night's adventure as he thought proper. When Spifkins sent up the coffee, the boy whom Tom had seen first of all in the doorway was asked what it was that Tom had smashed. It turned out that he had smashed nothing at all. His mop had caught in the handle of a coal-box that had been placed at the stair-foot to be handy the first thing in the morning. Naturally, the tumbling coals had roused the whole house.

When Sir Guy and his nephew had finished their refreshment Tom was bundled into a hot bath, and then to bed, where he slept as if he had a long life before him instead of the poor forty-six days that now remained to him.

Sir Guy wrote out some telegraph forms

with messages, to be sent as soon as the telegraph office should be open, then, in his turn, he tumbled wearily into bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN CUSTODY.

SIR GUY! Sir Guy!"

"What in the world's the matter now?" complained the M.P., turning wearily on his side. "What o'clock is it, and what do you want?"

"It's five minutes to ten, sir, and there's a police-inspector here says he must see you, sir, at once."

The voice was the voice of Spifkins, so it was bound to be all right. The butler knew his work too well to allow anything but really imperative business to interrupt his master's much-needed rest.

"All right, Spifkins; show him in. I don't intend to get up for a couple of hours yet."

"I'm exceedingly sorry to disturb you, sir," began the inspector, as he stood with his cap in his hand, "but we have just had word from our folks at Wandrage, saying that a boy Thomas Hammond was in your house. We have a warrant for his apprehension."

"A warrant!" cried Sir Guy starting up in bed. "He's my nephew, and a mere boy. Bolting from school is a matter for a caning, not for a warrant—the thing's ridiculous."

"I'm very sorry, sir. It's a really serious case. It's in connection with the disappearance of Dr. Ackwork. I daresay you've read of the case?"

"Um, a case of a schoolboy abducting his schoolmaster. Is the world turned upside down, or has Scotland Yard lost its head?"

"If my information is correct," replied the inspector drily, "it's your nephew that has lost his head."

Here Sir Guy caught Spifkins' eye, and a triumphant eye it was. It said "I told you so" as plainly as if the butler had used a

speaking-trumpet to do it. The master was angry at his servant, but had no just cause of complaint. So he cried out angrily:

"Spifkins, take the inspector downstairs and give him some refreshment. I shall be down in a few minutes."

"I'd like to make sure of the boy first, sir, if you don't mind," said the inspector respectfully.

"By all means," replied Sir Guy, keeping down his temper as well as he could, "only I think you might have more faith in—Pooh! what does it matter? Spifkins, show him the boy's room."

"Probably you don't know the history of the case and the extraordinary cleverness of the lad, or you wouldn't wonder at my caution," apologized the inspector as he followed the jubilant Spifkins out of the room.

Chocolate had a very bad quarter of an hour dressing his master that morning. Everything seemed to go wrong; so it is little wonder that he also turned against Tom.

As soon as Sir Guy had finished dressing he made for his nephew's room. Tom was already dressed in his shabby cast-off sailor clothes.

"What's this, officer? you're not going to send him north like that? These clothes would hang any boy, however innocent."

"We must catch the 11.30 mail, sir, and I've my report to make at headquarters before that. He says he's got no other clothes, and we haven't time to—"

Sir Guy gazed about him helplessly for a moment, then catching sight of Buttons, exclaimed:

"Spifkins, you get a cab; we've no time for the carriage. Peter, you bring your other suit like shot. It's not what I'd like for you, Tom, but it's at least clean."

Tom, however, wouldn't hear of putting on Buttons' uniform. A dirty cabin-boy could at least retain his self-respect, but no boy's spirit could survive those buttons.

Sir Guy drove them first to the inspector's headquarters, where he spoke pretty freely

of the silliness of the whole thing, without, however, in the slightest affecting their proceedings. Next he drove them to the railway-station, where he secured a compartment for the sole use of the inspector and his charge. When the train steamed out of the station with the queer pair Sir Guy stood wondering what it all meant.

The one thing he could not make out was the exceedingly matter-of-fact way that Tom took everything. It struck him as distinctly implying guilt. How could he be supposed to know that nothing in the world could now surprise that nephew of his?

The puzzled M.P. turned into the telegraph office, sent off four-and-sixpence worth of information to Tom's father, and then drove off to attend to his own business.

When Tom arrived at Wandrage Police Station he was asked question after question. He tried hard to keep Peas-blossom out of the answers, but the only result was that he became confused, and contradicted himself over and over again. He could give no

sort of reasonable account of the scalping-knife.

He got it from a "fellow", he said; but this was not considered enough. When he could not name the "fellow" it looked very suspicious.

The stains on the knife had been proved by chemical and microscopic examination to be made by human blood, and Tom did not know enough physiology to insist on an examination of the blood corpuscles to prove that they belonged to a red and not a white man.

Tom's story to account for the blood stains on his night-shirt was openly laughed at. Who had ever heard of a boy climbing a tree in his night-shirt two miles from his home? The thing was preposterous.

Tom was remitted to prison in the meantime.

The lawyer whom his father employed urged Tom to tell the whole truth as the only means of safety. After very much persuasion, and a distinct promise that nothing

he said would be laughed at, Tom did divulge to the lawyer the exact truth. Lawyers are not easily surprised, but this one did open his eyes when he heard all about Peas-blossom's goings-on. In his own mind the lawyer was quite sure now what was the right thing to do. But Mr. Hammond would not hear of a plea of insanity being brought in. "We'll keep that for our very last resource," said he.

"And when we do bring it forward," replied the lawyer, "there will be not the slightest difficulty in proving our case."

There was no sleep that night for Tom. As he lay and tossed on his hard narrow bed he was sorry he had ever seen Peas-blossom or heard of her wishes. Suddenly she appeared at the foot of his bed, standing on the bed-clothes and shaking her wand at him.

"So you thought you'd get the better of me, did you? Do you know that I am sent to teach contentment to discontented boys, do you? Clever boy! You haven't been so clever as you thought; you've made mistakes

just like the rest with all your cleverness! Have you learnt the lesson of contentment yet? Eh?"

She laughed and whistled, and was very happy at Tom's misery.

"Drop your preaching!" replied Tom sullenly. "Isn't it enough to get me into this scrape without crowing over a fellow and preaching at him?"

"Ah, you've changed your mind this time; but it won't matter. You've got to die in forty-five days. That is if they don't hang you first."

Peas-blossom laughed and whistled in the most aggravating way.

"If they hang me, then you've broken your word, for I'm not to die for forty-five days yet. If I need a lesson in contentment, you need one in truth. A fine fairy you are to preach at a fellow, and tell lies all the time."

Peas-blossom got very angry at this, and whistled so quickly that Tom could hardly make out what she said:

"I never lie. I cannot lie. Fairies al-

ways keep their word. We always keep our promises. We must."

"You must, must you?" asked Tom with flashing eyes, for a brilliant idea had just come to him. Peas-blossom answered so quietly that he could not hear her at all. She did not like his look. It was just this way he had looked last time he had got the better of her.

"Then, my lady, you owe me two wishes, and I insist on getting them. You promised me three wishes, and I've only had one, and it's led to all this bother. Come on with the other two!"

Poor Peas-blossom danced and whistled worse than she had ever done before. She had been so sure of having Tom under her thumb, and now he was going to get clean away. But perhaps not. Perhaps he'd make a mess of his two remaining wishes. He was almost sure to, she thought. Everybody did. At anyrate she could not help herself. She had to give the two wishes. She had promised them, and had to keep her word.

"All right," she screamed, "I'll give you your two wishes. Now wish! What are they?"

"I've more sense," replied Tom calmly. "There's no hurry. There's plenty of time. That's where I went wrong last time."

Tom was quite happy again, when a sudden fear once more sent him into the doleful dumps. Perhaps she couldn't give her gifts. He asked quite suspiciously:

"How can you give me any wishes just now? Won't I have to wait till Sunday till you have a wish to give away!"

"Oh, I don't use up my wishes in the silly way you did. I've quite a lot of wishes saved up from the time before you cheated me out of my right share."

"Then good-night, Peas-blossom. I must think very carefully what to do with these wishes."

She danced and whistled for a while, and was very angry indeed; but as Tom paid no attention to her she at length went out just like a candle, and that was the last he ever saw of her.

Tom naturally thought of wishing he was out of prison; but that was not enough, for he would soon be caught again. It was a risky thing to wish to be far away in some foreign place. He had had quite enough of that. Gradually he came to the conclusion that he could not wish anything better than that the Doctor might come back.

This would make them set Tom at liberty, for they could hardly keep him in prison for killing a man that was alive and well. Besides, it would comfort Mrs. Ackwork (Tom could not get her anxious face out of his mind) and put the school into working order again. No doubt it would mean another application of the warming-pan, but that was a small matter now.

So Tom finished up by formally wishing, in the midnight gloom of his dungeon, that the Doctor should return at once.

CHAPTER XV.

A PECULIAR DREAM.

POOR Mrs. Ackwork was lying only half asleep, listening to the ticking of the clock on the bed-room mantel-piece. She could not get a wink of sleep, though it was now far on towards midnight.

Suddenly her quick ear caught a peculiar sound, as of some one breathing heavily, and she was startled into full wakefulness by an unexpected but familiar voice.

"Most extraordinary!" said the voice—then there was nothing but puffing and gasping for a moment or two.

"Wonderfully vivid! indeed alarmingly so; quite a psychological phenomenon!" continued the voice. Then came sounds of fumbling and stumbling.

"Where are the matches, dear? I can't find them anywhere," went on the voice. After that Mrs. Ackwork was sure. The Doctor really had come back, at any rate his

voice had. But she didn't tell him where the matches were, she only asked the silly question:

"Is that you, Joseph dear?"

"Of course it's me, Maria! Who else could it be? Where are the matches?" replied the voice.

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried Mrs. Ackwork, "and where have you been all this time? Oh, it was cruel, cruel of you!"

"Where have I been all the time?" replied the voice a little impatiently, "I wish you'd tell me where the matches are, Maria!"

"Aren't you ashamed to—"

"I've got 'em," interrupted the voice, and as the blue light spluttered, and the lamp wick caught, the voice went on, "I had such a vivid dream, dear—bother that wick! ah! I'm turning the button the wrong way—that's it!—a dream all about the East, and Syria, and that sort of thing, and I—"

Here the lamp sent out a steady light, and the voice was interrupted by a wild scream from the bed.

“Good gracious, Maria! what is the matter?” cried the Doctor, “you’ll alarm the whole house!”

He rushed forward to the bed, but his wife held out her hands in horror, and screamed out:

“Keep back! keep back! Who are you? Oh, help! help!”

“What on earth is the matter, Maria? Have you lost your senses? We’ll have the whole house about our ears,” cried the Doctor, in dismay.

“It’s your voice, too, Joseph, but what a terrible—Oh! Oh! take it off! take it off at once!”

The Doctor turned round to see if he could discover the cause of his wife’s fears. He saw nothing out of the usual, till his eye chanced to fall on the mirror on the dressing-table, and his cheeks would have turned pale with horror if they could. But they were so red with sunburn that nothing could turn them pale—not even the sight of the hideous turban-like cap with which his head was adorned.

At this point there was a sound of rushing feet in the corridor, and a loud knock at the door was followed by the shrill question:

“What is it, Missus? Did you cry?”

The Doctor's natural instinct was to tear off his turban, and cast it from him, which happened to be the very best thing he could have done. For at the sight of his shining bald head, Mrs. Ackwork began to realize that this terrible intruder was her husband after all. Besides, nobody ever thinks of suspecting a man with a shining bald head. She recovered herself enough to call out:

“Oh, it's all right, Eliza. It's—it's—eh—eh—it's just the Doctor, who has returned suddenly, and I was—frightened—eh—for a moment.”

Then she looked over at the kindly face of her husband, and smiled a feeble smile, which soon grew into a giggle—an hysterical giggle. The poor Doctor did his best to relieve his wife's anxiety, and was gradually bringing her round to the listening point,

when a heavy knock banged on the door, followed by the gruff demand:

"Open at once! I'm agoing to see that this is all right! 'Oo knows but it's a bloom-in' burgular a-makin' the Missis say things so's to keep hus out."

It was Peters' deep voice. He had evidently been summoned by the maids, and been dissatisfied with the result of their inquiry.

"It's all right, Peters," answered the Doctor in his deep official tones; "you can all go off to bed now."

When the Doctor spoke like that there was no replying, so the servants went off, if not to bed, at least down to their own quarters, where they no doubt fully discussed this knotty problem.

If the servants were puzzled, their master was not less so. He could not make out what his wife meant by saying he had been so long away, and still less could he understand how a dream could leave behind it (1) a head-dress that was a sort of compound of

a turban and a peaked cap; (2) a pair of linen trousers, very baggy, no doubt, but none the worse for that, and none the less real; (3) a linen tunic; (4) a turkey-red belt or girdle; (5) a pair of large shoes made of untanned leather.

As the Doctor looked at this strange dress, he could only murmur:

"An extraordinarily vivid dream. I wonder if it is quite over yet, and will I awake soon?"

Here his wife, who had been also gazing keenly at her husband's strange get-up, put in her criticism.

"They're not very clean—are they, dear?"

This very practical remark startled the Doctor. It was just the sort of thing his wife would say in real life; it did not seem the least like a dream. He turned to her.

"Tell me, Maria, am I sleeping or waking?"

"You should know best, my dear," replied she with a nervous smile, "but you certainly look wide enough awake."

"Ask me some question, dear, something

in arithmetic, say, to see if I can answer it all right."

Now it is very awkward to be asked to set an examination paper in arithmetic in the middle of the night, especially after having had such a shock as poor Mrs. Ackwork had had. So it is little wonder that she could think of nothing but some kitchen problem about a certain number of boys and a certain weight of meat, and a certain quantity of vegetables. She got terribly muddled with her question, and the Doctor, naturally, could not answer it, which threw him into a greater state of doubt than ever.

By and by, however, Mrs. Ackwork made a reference to the bath-room that more than half convinced the Doctor that he was still in his right mind. The bath-room at least was real enough—but there it is only polite to leave him.

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Next morning the Doctor appeared in his accustomed place, and said prayers as usual, trying very hard to appear as if nothing

special had happened. His efforts were miserable failures. Everybody in school was busy guessing what had kept him so long away from his post.

Even the masters were not free from the desire to know where the Doctor had been; so at recess Mr. Dawkins was quite pleased to receive a request to speak with the headmaster in his study. He expected an explanation, and was not disappointed.

As soon as they had entered, the Doctor carefully locked the door, and giving the visitor a chair, began nervously:

"I'm a good deal troubled, Dawkins, about a rather remarkable dream I've had. Not that I believe in dreams, of course, but this is really so remarkable, that I feel constrained to fall back upon your scientific knowledge for an explanation."

"Most dreams admit of explanation, but almost in every case it is the dreamer alone that holds the key," replied Dawkins.

"Yes, yes; but this is different. This dream is quite out of the common."

"Naturally; everybody thinks his own dream marvellous," was Dawkins' somewhat contemptuous reply.

"No doubt," answered the Doctor meekly, then added with a more assured air, "but everybody's dream doesn't leave a fantastic suit of clothes behind it."

"Eh? What?" and Dawkins regarded his chief curiously. "Perhaps we'll understand each other better if you begin by telling me all about this strange dream."

"Just my opinion. Well, I dreamt that I found myself on a heated sandy plain with no trees, and scarcely any green thing. There were a few shrubs here and there, and some mounds with the stones peeping out, as if they hid the remains of some building. It was fortunate that it was warm, for I was very scantily clad; in fact," here the Doctor looked a little sheepish, "in fact I had nothing on but my night-shirt."

"Quite normal, quite usual," muttered Dawkins approvingly; "there's nothing more common in dreams than this scanty attire."

Reassured, the Doctor went on to tell how he had sought shelter from the fierce heat of the sun under the projecting ledge of a rock. How he had noticed a black speck in the distance grow bigger and bigger till it swelled into a small caravan of some thirty people, some walking, some on the backs of camels (thirteen camels—the Doctor had had time to count them afterwards) and horses. How they all looked “just like the picture in the Physical Geography Text-book”. How they had seized the poor Doctor and had evidently questioned him. How he had tried his Latin and his Greek in vain, then his French and German, and all the other languages of which scraps were taught at Willowbank School. How they had made him accompany them, on foot, all that weary day, giving him nothing to eat but some tough bread—that was neither bread nor biscuit, but had all the bad qualities of both—and some dried fruits. How at night they had seized his night-shirt, which had aroused the envy of the chief (which it well might, con-

sidering the price Mrs. Ackwork had paid for it at a church bazaar), and had given him a suit of light but dirty garments. How next day he had walked and walked. How his feet had blistered. How the next day he had again walked till the savages (the Doctor never called them anything else) took pity on him and put him on a camel. How he had almost wished to be on foot again, so uncomfortable was he on the camel's back. How the big clumsy beast had swayed from side to side and made him sick. How they had arrived at a biggish town, and how he had been led before some very important person in the inner court of a curiously coloured, but very dirty house. How he had again wasted his Latin and Greek and other Willowbank accomplishments. How frightened he was at the two men who had stood behind him with naked scimitars. How, after this examination, he had been restored to the chief who had first picked him up; how he had been shut up in a little, dirty, vile-smelling den; and how, in

the middle of an agony of thirst, he had awoke to find himself on his bedroom floor looking for the matches.

"And that's all?" asked Dawkins drily.

"That's all," replied the Doctor, "except that—" here the Doctor looked up very uneasily at Dawkins, and went on hurriedly, "except that my night-shirt has really gone, and the dirty suit remains, and the blisters," he added, moving his feet uneasily.

Dawkins made no comment at all for a minute; then, as the Doctor remained silent, asked coldly:

"Is that all?"

"Yes," replied the Doctor in an embarrassed way, "except that my face is as sun-burnt as if my dream had been true."

"Yes," was the cordial, not to say suspicious reply, "your face is very red."

"Well, I'm at my wits' end. What do you make of it?"

"Don't you think your absence from school is a much more curious thing than the strange clothes in which you returned?"

"My absence!" gasped the Doctor; "Mrs. Ackwork said something about this too. How long have I been absent?"

"You disappeared on Friday morning, and this is Wednesday," replied Dawkins, regarding him curiously.

"Just five days as in the dream," murmured the Doctor in a dazed way. "I must have walked really in my sleep."

"A longish walk," said Dawkins drily. "If I had been a Theosophist now, I might have talked about your thoughts being materialized into clothes and blisters; but we don't believe in that sort of rubbish, you and I, do we?"

"Eh, no—no, certainly not—of course not; but I am very unhappy about it. I can't make it out at all—and my feet are very painful."

"Would you mind showing me the—eh—garments?" said Dawkins after an awkward pause.

"By all means," replied the Doctor, eagerly bustling out to get the clothes.

But nothing resulted from the examination of these remnants of the strange dream. Dawkins tried hard not to be suspicious; but in view of those garments, and the Doctor's wild story, he found it very hard.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THOUGH Dawkins found it hard not to suspect the Doctor, Inspector Blankitt did not. He didn't try. He suspected him right away. You see, he was angry with the Doctor, because by his coming back he had completely spoiled a good-going case. Blankitt had formed half-a-dozen capital theories of the cause of the Doctor's disappearance, and had discovered half-a-dozen clues to match. No inspector likes his theories and clues to be thrown to the winds, so it is not to be wondered at that Blankitt was discontented.

He thought that it was all mighty fine,

this cock-and-bull story of a strange dream with its stranger leavings of clothes and blisters. But Blankitt wanted to know a great number of things. First, and chiefly, he wanted to know what they took him for when they came to him with yarns like these. Then he wanted to know how long it took to go to the country where they wore "togs like these", and he kicked the togs contemptuously as he spoke.

"There ain't any return tickets to those parts 'available for five days only'," he growled sarcastically to Dawkins. For Dawkins was the man who had called him in to help to find the Doctor, and Blankitt was inclined to regard the science master as in some way responsible for the break-down of the case. To the police mind it looked uncommonly like obtaining their services under false pretences. Dawkins' idea was now to turn away Blankitt's attention, so he answered civilly enough:

"No, inspector, I'm afraid this problem is a little beyond our depth. It is certainly

for philosophers, not for Scotland Yard folks."

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Blankitt mysteriously. "I've known stranger cases. What I want to know is why Dr. Ackwork's face is so red, and particularly his nose, since he started dreaming?"

There was a world of sarcasm in the way he said the last word. But Dawkins rather damped his ardour by pointing out that the Doctor's face was always florid, and that though he was fond enough of a glass of port on occasion, he was well known to be rigidly abstemious.

"That may be," replied the inspector; "but I'm going to find out where he spent those five days. I've sent on a wire first thing this morning, and by to-night I'll have enough information to go on. London's a grand place to dream in."

Dawkins did not at all like the inspector's innuendos, so he somewhat stiffly wished him good-morning. But the policeman was succeeded by Dr. Cerebrerr, who made poor

Dawkins still more unhappy about his chief.

"It is a most singular circumstance," began Dr. Cerebrerr, who had just had an interview with the headmaster, under pretext of consulting him about Tom. "I have never had anything like it in my experience before. A most interesting case—a most interesting case."

"You don't mean to say you think this a case for you?" asked Dawkins uneasily; "Blankitt seems to think it is more in his line."

"Shouldn't wonder, shouldn't wonder," replied the doctor eagerly; "very often his cases and mine seem to overlap." Here the doctor appeared to let his mind wander; but after a while he returned to the subject with a slowly uttered, "No, I shouldn't wonder."

"But does he really show symptoms of insanity, doctor? To me his story seems exceedingly logical and well arranged, however improbable it is."

"Yes, yes," replied the doctor, rubbing his hands, "and the improbability arises from the fundamental arrest of spontaneous cerebration, the train of automatic cerebration remaining perfect once the train is set in motion—you follow?"

Dawkins admitted in a half-hearted way that he sort of understood what Dr. Cerebrerr was at—but he didn't really. All he knew was that poor Dr. Ackwork was suspected by Blankitt to be a rogue, and by Cerebrerr to be a madman.

"What naturally interests me most," went on Cerebrerr, "is the relation between the two cases, Hammond's and Ackwork's. Each is exceptionally interesting in itself, but their relation to each other is more interesting still. Is it cause and effect, common cause, pure coincidence, germ transfer, imitative paralysis—what? A most interesting pair of cases, most interesting!"

Dawkins listened with feelings of ill-disguised hate to this pitiless scientific talk. He was positively relieved when Cerebrerr's

tall figure disappeared down the corridor. Yet of the two he had to confess that he preferred Cerebrerr to Blankitt.

At night Dawkins had to attend to a letter he had received from the inspector, appointing a meeting at the "Old Oak" to go into the Doctor's case. Blankitt received him cordially, but poor Dawkins read mischief in the triumphant twinkle in the policeman's eye. When the two were alone, the inspector produced a big blue envelope, from which he took several single sheets of closely written paper.

"These are accounts of people dressed somewhat like the Doctor in his dream," explained the inspector. "Living in the country as you do, you have no idea, I daresay, of the number of queerly dressed folks to be found any day in London. I have eleven descriptions here of Asiatics seen in London during the dream. Only two of them have any chance of turning out to be the Doctor."

This last sentence was said with deep

regret, not so deep, however, as that in which the inspector added, when he saw that Dawkins was not going to offer any remark:

"There has been nothing particular reported at headquarters during the time, so I'm afraid it isn't a criminal case—against the Doctor."

"Then why do you trouble your head about it?" demanded Dawkins relieved, and a little angry.

"Oh, though the Doctor may not have broken the law, somebody may have done it for him. He may have been robbed in London—indeed, I should say there is nothing in the world more likely."

"My good man," replied Dawkins hotly, "if you would only mind your own business it would be a blessing to all concerned. If there is anything wrong, it is Dr. Cerebrerr that will have to look after it. If you keep poking your nose into this affair, you will do so at your peril."

"Come, now, Mr. Dawkins, between our-

selves, is his story quite so probable and ordinary that you are quite satisfied with it yourself?"

Worried as he was, Dawkins here lost his temper completely, and left the inspector, after having spoken pretty plainly to that suspicious officer.

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That day of the Doctor's return was a miserable one for everybody in school, but particularly so for Tom. He had been set at liberty as soon as the Doctor's return had disposed of the charge against him, but he felt as if he would just as soon be in prison as out of it. He wanted above everything to be sent to another school, and had pled long and earnestly with his father on the subject. He was avoided by everybody, and now he knew the cause. They all thought him mad.

But Mr. Hammond was wisely firm. He told the boy that his whole future depended on his being able to live down this silly story of insanity. To go away from Willow-

bank would be to admit that the report was true. Therefore at Willowbank he had to remain.

But it was dreary work. It was bad enough to be suspected of such a terrible thing, but there was a much greater horror for Tom than that. It was to look upon the Doctor's face, and mark there the wandered, broken expression—and then to think that all this suffering had been the result of his Peas-blossom troubles. Tom grew bitter, bitter against Peas-blossom, and more bitter against himself. It was true that he had one more wish left, but he was actually afraid to use it, so badly had all the rest turned out. Still this one wish gave him hope: only he had very firmly made up his mind that he would not wish anything till he had very, very, very carefully considered the whole matter.

Among Tom's other worries was the wonder that this day had produced no wish. It was a Wednesday, so the Sunday exception had nothing to do with it this time.

How was poor Tom to know that the next wish in order was that the Willowbank Club should win at the ensuing match with the Greenloaning fellows, and that even Peas-blossom could not be expected to make a school win a match that was not yet played. She would see that the match went the right way when it came to be played. Only, Tom did not know of this, and was correspondingly uneasy. He never knew what Peas-blossom might be up to when anything out of the common occurred.

However, the thing that caused him more real suffering than all else was the dreadful effects of his wish on the Doctor. Though he was again in Coventry Tom contrived to hear a good deal of the ill-natured gossip about the Doctor. But he did not need to hear it—he actually saw it in the Doctor's appearance. The master was sitting at his desk, the sunburn now completely gone, and if some of his old ruddiness still remained it had no longer the healthy glow of the old times.

His eyes were sunken and restless. His clothes hung loosely on his once portly frame. Tom thought of the study table and felt sure that the Doctor could no longer fill the big bay in it. And who was to blame for all this?

And how was it all to be put right with just one wish? Poor Tom wanted so many things. He wanted the Doctor to be well again; he wanted him to be free from all suspicion of having done any wrong; he wanted himself to be free from the suspicion of being mad; and above all he did not wish to die in forty-odd days. This last wish was the one that troubled him most. If it had not been for that awful fate hanging over him he would at once have wished the Doctor well, and then have taken the consequences for himself. But dying was a different affair.

He worried over it all afternoon, and when it came to bed-time he found he could not get a wink of sleep. He tossed and tumbled and worried over this one wish, and all he wanted

for it, till he got quite fevered and ill. Hour after hour struck without bringing either any decision to his mind or sleep to his eyelids. The hall clock was wearily working its way through the twelve strokes of midnight, and Tom was wearily counting them. He had got the length of "seven, eight" when there was a queer tug at his heart, a little gasp, and poor Tom stood shivering in his night-shirt in the midst of a forest. He knew at once what had happened. While he had been so busy thinking about this last wish, and all that he wanted for it, he had been forgetting his regular wishes that were still going on; and here he was, caught in the midst of a wild forest. He knew he was in danger of all sorts, but the one danger he was most afraid of was Red Indians, for he had wished to be among them—"wild Red Indians", he remembered he had wished, "not the tame ones at Buffalo Bill's". Now he wished he had not been so particular. He would have given a great deal for a sight of Buffalo Bill just at that moment.

The sun was setting behind the huge trees; everything was lovely to look upon. But Tom did not look upon it. He was too busy listening to a dull monotonous drum that could be heard not far off. He was sure it belonged to the Red Indians, but he was not sure from which direction the sound came, so he had no idea which was the best way to run, in order to escape. He was saved all the trouble of thinking out this question, by the unexpected appearance of an ugly face among the foliage, just a few yards off. The face made some remarks in a voice as ugly as itself, and as Tom had not presence of mind to say anything at all, even in English, the face got angry, and a gun as ugly as either the face or the voice peeped out of the green leaves. Tom thought it was all up with him now. He remembered that all the Red Indians he had read about had had bows and arrows; so he felt a little ill-used at being on the point of getting shot with a common gun—but this thought soon passed away in the more distressing one of

the view of immediate death. All his presence of mind fled. He just fell half fainting on the ground and groaned.

“Oh, how I wish I had never seen Peasblossom at all!”

In his agony he had done what he could not have done in his sober senses. He had wished just the right wish to get everybody out of their troubles. For a moment he felt almost sick, but when he looked around him the forest was gone, and he found himself safe within the Carcer.

Yes, there he was, safe enough, thanking heaven that those thick walls were there. There, sure enough, was the table, there the chair. Yonder on the wall, too, were the figures that he had drawn on that day which now seemed so long ago. There, in the corner, his Vergil still lay, just where he had shied it. On the table lay the unruled paper waiting for his lines.

Tom was so delighted that he made up his mind to finish his work at once. He picked up his book, sat down at the table,

and then found that he could not so easily get over past sins. There was no ink—it had been all spent on that picture gallery on the wall.

Stopped thus on the very threshold of the new life he intended to lead, Tom gazed helplessly on the wall, and noticed how much higher the four quivering squares of sunshine were than when he had seen them last.

Then a happy thought came into his head. He pulled out a stump of lead-pencil from his vest pocket, sharpened it with a blunt knife, licked the lead, and went on with his Vergil.

He had still two pages to do, when Peters came to open the door and lead him to the Doctor.

“Well, Hammond, show up your work,” said the Doctor, noticing with pleasure the happy look on Tom’s face. The boy was evidently in a humour to do his best to satisfy his master, therefore the Carcer was to be a success. The Doctor was glad.

“It isn’t quite done, sir.”

The master said nothing, but carefully examined the exercise. As he did so Tom carefully examined him. The boy in the table was well filled, the cheeks were full, and the eyes bright: the colour had come back to the Doctor's face, and the calm kindly look into his eyes.

Suddenly those eyes caught Tom's.

"Why didn't you finish it?—two pages an hour of a little book like this isn't too much."

"No, sir. I—I—The fact is, sir, I idled away my time for the first part, so I hadn't time at the end. I worked hard, but I couldn't make up for lost time."

"'M—m, nobody ever did make up for lost time. That was why you took to pencil, I suppose?"

"No, sir." Here Tom became very red, and felt very uncomfortable, but he went gallantly on, "I used up all the ink, and then I had to use my pencil, rather than do nothing at all."

"Used up all your ink on a couple of small pages of Vergil!"

"No, sir, I used it up on the wall."

"On the wall? Do you—"

At this moment there was a knock at the study door. On the Doctor's deep "Come in" Peters entered with his hat in his hand and fire in his eye.

"Well, Peters, what is it?" asked the Doctor, looking at his servant over the rim of his gold spectacles.

"It's this young varmint, sir, as has put us all on the wall o' th' prison. There's me an' all the masters an' yourself too, sir. It's a sight to see, sir."

"So you were writing on the wall—that is where the ink went?"

The tone was stern, and therefore pleasing to Peters, who at once struck in before Tom had time to answer.

"No, sir, not writin' but drorin'. You should just see for yourself, sir."

"I will," replied the Doctor rising. "Wait here till I return, Hammond."

While the master was away Tom made what little preparations were in his power

for the calamity that he foresaw was about to fall upon him—or at least upon part of him. All the preparations that school-boy experience had taught him were much needed that evening, for the warming-pan was exceptionally hot. The Doctor was very angry that his fine new prison should be thus spoiled by its very first inmate.

Tom really meant to turn over a new leaf after his bitter experience, but he knew that this was not the time to say so. After the proceedings had terminated in the Doctor's study, Tom was dismissed with the words:

“Now you will spend to-morrow afternoon again in the Carcer, and will have an opportunity of doing your ten pages in ink yet.”

Tom felt stiff and sore as he came downstairs, but his heart was glad within him. What was a licking to a veteran like him, compared to the agony he had gone through of late.

At the gate of the Doctor's garden—beyond which no boy dared to go on the side

(as Euclid would say) remote from the playground — stood Stedman waiting for his friend.

“Hullo, Bunker!”

“Hullo, Tubs!”

That was all that was said. But Bunker's right hand was soon on Tom's right shoulder, and Tom's left hand on Bunker's left shoulder. As the two friends wandered over the meadows for the half hour that was still free, Tom pumped his friend to see how much he remembered of the events of the past few days.

“You didn't think me cracked, did you, Bunker?”

“Cracked? Oh, you mean about the pictures—I think them just bully. You should have seen the fellows laughing! We all nearly burst. The time Reet (term of affection for Peters) was away blabbing on you I was made showman because I knew you best, and the fellows got in only ten at a time. Do you know, Tubs, I'd give anything to draw like you.”

"And you didn't believe the Doctor was cracked either, eh?"

"Not much. Did you, old man, just now up in the Torture Chamber?"

It was a sore joke, but Tom was delighted to find that everything had been completely forgotten. Naturally his mind now turned to his punishment for the next day. He told Bunker about it.

"It's a beastly shame, Tubs. He's no right to lick us and keep us in his rotten old prison, and make us do poenas all for the same thing."

How Tom did enjoy this sympathy after all his worries! However, he did not say anything. Only he tightened his grip on Bunker's shoulder. Bunker returned the grip, as he said:

"Never mind, Tubs, I'll do half the lines."

THE END.



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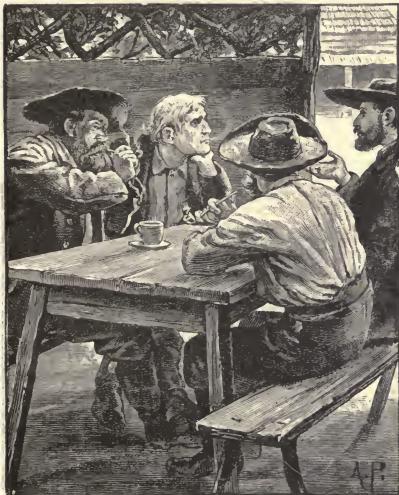
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